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HUMANITARIANISM AND THE ROMANTICS.

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C O N T E N T S

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INTRODUCTION.

To question the efficacy of humanitarianism in itself is, I think analogous to asking the question whether there is any point in our ability to sympathize with one another, and with all that feels. Sympathy in itself is not productive of any concrete, material results, but it may well be - as it oftentimes is - the fountain-head of all such results. As to the spiritual side of the question, does the ability to live and participate in a common world of feelings, of all that contributes to the richness and beauty of life, not mean anything?

The Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics, edited by James Hastings, tells us:

> "Humanitarianism in the ethical sense - wholly distinct from the theological - is the deliberate and systematic study of humane principles, the attempt to show that humaneness is an integral part, if not the actual basis, of morals. .....Of all mistaken notions concerning humanitarianism, the most mistaken is that which regards it as some extraneous artificial cult, forced on human nature from without; whereas in truth it is founded on an instinctive conviction from within, a very part of human development. When we talk of a man 'becoming a humanitarian', what we really mean is that he has recognized a fact that was already within his consciousness - the kinship of all sentient life - of which

humanitarianism is the avowed and definite proclamation." 1

The Encyclopaedia of Social Sciences, edited by E.R.A.Seligman, further tells us that:

> "A humanitarian seeks to lessen suffering and increase enjoyment among all forms of sentient life. He presumably feels love or friendship toward the object of his concern; yet his strongest emotion is a kind of imaginative flinching before the spectacle of inflicted pain. An emotional experience of direct, intense love for mankind in a mass is probably rare. Humanitarian movements have been chiefly directed toward preventing recognizable physical cruelty to men or animals or both. Where humanitarian efforts seek a positive addition to the happiness of sentient beings, it is to make the unhappy happy rather than the happy happier." 2

Thus we have the ethical and sociological concepts of humanitarianism. Its strength lies in the fact that as a system of thought, it is founded upon the consolidation of the countless humane impulses that spring up everywhere in the human heart, and that, on an instinct so simple as to be intelligible to a child, it builds an ethical and sociological system that can satisfy the searchings of the most critical intellect. Not only this; by its appeal to this vast aggregate of scattered, isolated, and therefore ineffective, impulses and feelings, it is able to collect and focus

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1. Volume VI, p. 836.
2. Volume VII, p. 544.

them into an energetic and effective whole with monumental results on the social scene and in the minds of all thinking men.

As a student of English literature, is it any wonder that I should be keen to show how largely our modern poets have been concerned in this humanizing process?

As a branch of ethical science, humanitarianism is a modern product, for it was not until the eighteenth century - the age of 'sensibility' - that there began to be any wide-spread recognition of humaneness as a force in civilized society. No doubt the duty of love and gentleness to sentient life has been inculcated all down the ages as part of the higher teachings, and it is scattered here and there in the works of various writers of the Renaissance, among them, More, Erasmus, Montaigne, Shakespeare and Bacon. All these men contributed towards the recognition of the claims of common life on human-kind.

It is not the purpose of my studies to defend humanitarianism as a system of ethical or sociological thought against, for example, the common charges of idealism, inconsistency and emotionalism. Rather I wish to study it in its historical context, in relation

to a number of people who lived and wrote during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, and who accepted its importance as a system of thought, and as a social force, as irrefutable, because it is so closely bound up with our very nature, and so completely responsible for the many institutions which have brought relief to much intense suffering.

The period from 1780 to 1830 in English history is instinct with reforming zeal and liberal ideas, called into being by the urgencies of the time. The abolition of the slave-trade, the prevention of cruelty to animals, the reform of criminal law, the renovation of the Poor Law system, the improvement of prison conditions, the establishment of popular education and, above all, the achievement of Parliamentary Reform as essential to the success of all the above-mentioned agitations - these were some of the schemes then widely canvassed. With all these reforms, certain names are implicitly linked. Some of these personalities will be studied in order to compare them - if that be possible - with certain luminaries from the literary world of the Romantics, to see how closely or remotely their ideas had a common sphere of influence, since all lived within the same era.

In dealing with the characters I have chosen as representative figures of the enlightened and humane society of the period, I have paid close attention to certain predominant events in their social, political and religious background, without which none of their thoughts or actions could be fully understood and duly evaluated, viz., the French Revolution and the Napoleonic Wars; the Industrial and Agricultural Revolutions on this Isle, and the impact of the Evangelical Revival upon her inhabitants.

In reviewing the lives of my first set of characters, namely John Howard and Elizabeth Fry from the prison world; William Wilberforce and Thomas Clarkson of the Abolition Movement; and Richard Lovell Edgeworth and Thomas Day, who belonged to no particular, organized movement but, in their own individual ways, strove along with the others in the general direction of the betterment of the lot of humanity, I lay no claim to originality, except, perhaps, in some few comments upon the last two mentioned. The footnotes are intended to indicate the authorities I have consulted and to be an acknowledgment to the authors.

Lastly, in dealing with my literary characters - William Cowper, George Crabbe, and William Wordsworth

- I have tried to note their varied outlooks on life and their individual reactions to some of the pressing problems of their day, under the headings of: prisoners; slaves; the poor; the educational need of the people as fundamental to the solution of all great social problems; and the treatment of animals as indicative of the deepening of human sensibility to all that feels. I have tried to do so by a careful study of the poets' lives, correspondence and work, as well as of all such references as may have had some bearing on the topic of my research. My purpose throughout has been the determination of the extent to which the poets have aided - if at all - in the labours of my first set of characters, and to bring in comparisons whenever possible.

None of the work of the three poets mentioned provides us with a body of doctrine, at least not that of Cowper and Crabbe. What they had to say may not have assisted directly in the solution of any social, political, or economic problem. Perhaps this was, and is, never expected of a poet; after all, poets are more concerned with life as a whole than with the mechanics of living. Still, the steadying and strengthening effect of the intellectual forces they released - so

vitally needed by all serious-minded people of their own feverish times - which has survived to our own day, has its deep significance when measured against the more earthly and concrete achievements of a Howard or a Wilberforce. It is my purpose to study the comparative merit or efficacy of their achievements - both in the material field, and in that of the intellect and the spirit.

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CHAPTER I.

THE PRISON WORLD OF JOHN HOWARD AND ELIZABETH FRY.

Towards the end of the eighteenth century there were about three hundred offences against the English law for which the punishment was death. Those who ruled, fearful of the growing lawlessness, made the punishments more and more severe. Prisons were the cages of the damned and the defeated.

In this chapter, I wish to delineate John Howard in his rôle as the father of prison reforms, tracing his activities as a private, unaided, individual agitator, and leading on to the organized efforts of his successor, Elizabeth Fry.

Until Howard came on the scene as the sheriff of Bedfordshire with the subjoined duty of superintending the prisons of the county in 1773 - a duty which he, unlike his associates, regarded seriously - the sordid history of English prisons was brightened only by three names, those of Thomas Fermin, General Oglethorpe and James Nield. Owing to the defective state of the law, they were not able to accomplish any lasting or definite reform. They - and their successors,

Howard and Fry - were faced with a State which regarded its duty as discharged when it had deprived men of their liberty, and accepted no responsibility for their maintenance, thus leaving them to the mercy of unscrupulous (because unsalaried and ill-supervised) gaolers. Criminals, it was considered, had by their own act placed themselves outside the pale of the law; and no one was bound to think of their rights or their wrongs: having set the law at defiance, of course they could have no claim on its protection.

At the commencement of his period of office as sheriff, Howard was shocked to find that many prisoners who had long since paid the original debt for which they had been confined, still remained in durance because they could not pay the gaoler's fees. Howard proposed to his fellow magistrates that a salary should be paid to the officer in order that these charges might be removed. The justices were not unwilling, but found themselves unable to adopt so sensible a plan unless precedents could be produced for doing so. Howard thereupon took a journey to the neighbouring counties in search of one. To his surprise, none existed. In the course of his investigations, he was struck with the deplorable aspect of many of the prisoners. He resolved

to extend his enquiries, and thus commenced his great investigations. Gradually, and in successive journeys, he included all the prisons of the country in his survey, and extended it to all the principal countries of Europe.

In almost every country of the continent which Howard visited, he had found the prisoners employed. This was the strong point of contrast with the usage in England. In fact, hard work was the chief correctional agent at that time in operation abroad. In this country correction was hardly thought of - confinement was the only aim. At home and abroad, he was able to trace every improvement, and to note the more numerous cases in which there continued unabated such evils as absence of drainage; filthy, dark, close, damp and ruinous buildings; prevalence of gaol fever and a general lack of life's bare essentials - water, food and clothing. The sale of intoxicants in the gaol was the greatest evil; others were the gambling and the loose morals of the mixed inmates.

Howard determined to arouse the country to the sense of a duty which it alone could discharge, and to do this by an unsparing description of its terrible magnitude. This discovery that diagnosis must precede

cure is the distinguishing mark of this philanthropist. To amass materials for this great work, he travelled not less than 13,418 miles in a period of three years.[1] The result of all this was his book, The State of the Prisons in England and Wales; with Preliminary Observations, and an Account of Some Foreign Prisons. It was published in 1777.

On his becoming an author, Howard had this to say:

> "A person of more ability, with my knowledge of facts, would have written better; but the object of my ambition was not the fame of an author. Hearing the cry of the miserable, I devoted my time to their relief. To procure it, I made it my business to collect materials, the authenticity of which could not be disputed. If my publication should be the means of exciting the attention of my countrymen to this important national concern, of alleviating the distresses of poor debtors and other prisoners; of procuring for them cleanly and wholesome abodes, and exterminating the gaol-fever, which has so often spread abroad its dreadful contagion; of abolishing, or at least reducing the fees of clerks of assize, and of the peace; of preventing the sale of liquors in prisons; of checking the impositions of gaolers, and the extortion of bailiffs; of introducing a habit of industry into our Bridewells, and restraining the shocking debauchery and immorality which prevail in our gaols and other prisons; if any of these beneficial consequences shall accrue, I shall be

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1. Dixon, John Howard and the Prison World of Europe, p. 206.

> happy in the pleasing reflection that I have not lived without doing some good to my fellow-creatures; and shall think myself abundantly repaid for all the pains I have taken, the time I have spent, and the hazards I have encountered. 1

Can anyone doubt the compassion of such a man?

His care and anxiety concerning the accuracy and veracity of all his statements - not only in this publication but in subsequent ones, viz., Appendix to the State of Prisons in England and Wales, Etc., with Remarks on the State of Hospitals, Foreign and English, (January, 1780); and An Account of the Principal Lazarettoes in Europe, with Various Papers Relative to the Plague; Together with Further Observations on Some Foreign Prisons and Hospitals, and Additional Remarks on the Present State of Those in Great Britain and Ireland, (December, 1788) - caused him to adhere to various precautionary measures. He always carried a memorandum book on his inspection tours, putting down in it every single particular he thought worthy of notice, directly it was observed; never trusting to his memory even the most trivial statement. He would never rely on the statements of others, but was an eye-witness to every scene he described, even when it meant risking

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1. Taylor, Memoirs of John Howard, p. 233.

his own life, as when he contrived to have himself confined in the lazaretto at Venice for purposes of studying the symptoms and possible remedies of the plague. If he ever felt dissatisfied with the information he had obtained respecting any prison, he revisited it, even though it might be situated in the far-flung corners of the Near East! He never spared himself. He was twice called before the House of Commons to be questioned on his researches, and was thanked by it for his services not only to his country, but to sufferers all over the world, an honour most deservedly conferred.

Howard was an earnest advocate of home treatment of crime in opposition to transportation. His own idea was to confine convicts in a great penal workprison, where the security would be greater, the labour more productive, the punishment more severe, and the reform more certain. This notion of his gained favour with the government [1] and an Act (19 Geo. III, c. 74) was obtained in 1780 for the construction of two penitentiary houses in Middlesex, Surrey, Kent or Essex to try the great experiment of Home Correctional Discipline. Howard was named first supervisor of the undertaking.

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1. Dixon, John Howard and the Prison World of Europe, p. 242.

The situation of the intended buildings, however, made a matter of obstinate contention; Howard resigned, and with his resignation, the project, which had probably never been seriously entertained by the Ministry, was abandoned. In its stead the Botany Bay transportation scheme was adopted. Precious years of selfless labour were thus given up, to be consumed in re-enacting former failures.

So far, as B.K.Gray tells us in his book, A History of English Philanthropy, (pp. 184-187), the chief material gain from the agitations of one lonely man, is to be found in the growing practice of paying a salary to gaolers, the improvements in the structure and cleanliness of the buildings, and the more adequate provision of food and clothing. The expense was to fall on the national funds. This shows, says Mr. Gray, that the State, with some reservations, had accepted the theory of its responsibility for those whom it deprived of power over their own lives. It was becoming evident, however, that the difficulty was even more one of administration than of legislation. The reforms of the prisons could not be carried very far until the reform of local government should be undertaken. A specific instance may help to convince one of the urgent need for

such a step. On the 2nd of July, 1783, Howard, in the company of his son, arrived at Dublin on a visit to Ireland. On the following day he commenced his labours by the re-inspection of a new prison. Thomas Taylor describes his findings in the following words:

> "He (Howard) was grieved to find it most grossly mismanaged. Fifteen prisoners were detained for their fees. Offenders of every description were huddled together. The sexes were not properly separated. Intoxication, and all its attendant evils, prevailed to a lamentable extent, owing to the sale of spirits, which was openly permitted. Gaming was tolerated, and even encouraged. The sick were entirely neglected, ...being without bedding, or a change of linen..... The prison was very scantily supplied with water, and every part of it was in the dirtiest condition imaginable. As might be expected in such a state of things, the moral and spiritual improvement of the prisoners was utterly disregarded. .....Much of this inattention was undoubtedly to be attributed to the keepers; but more, in Howard's opinion, to the magistrates who were appointed to visit and inspect the prison at regular and stated intervals, but who had grossly neglected their duty. 'Are not such individuals,' he very properly asks, 'inexcusably guilty? Should they not be considered as accessory to the crimes, and abuses, and miseries occasioned by their neglect?'" 1

We should notice at this point that in spite of some attempts at improvements, this was the general picture which Howard encountered ten years after he started his

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1. Taylor, Memoirs of John Howard, p. 225.

heroic labours.

What was the source of his unfailing strength and perseverance in face of all these disappointments and obstacles; yes, even in face of great personal tragedy in the insanity of his only son? What was it that enabled him to adhere steadfastly to his two principal objects with respect to the prisoners, viz., to alleviate their miseries, and correct their vices? That he was motivated by his religious faith goes without saying, as his piety is more than amply proven by the tone of his journals and letters, and the report of his friends, but there is something else. I think we can call it his deep faith in humanity. In Mrs. John Farrar's words, Howard

> ".....considered all men as partaking of one common nature, and as having claims upon their fellow beings of which nothing can wholly deprive them; that even the highest degree of criminality does not excuse us from feeling compassion for the criminal, especially when he is suffering the consequences of his wickedness; that, as no man passes through life without some deviation from strict rectitude, so none has lived without the performance of some good actions. He was therefore convinced that it was the duty of society to provide for the health, and even, in some degree, for the comfort of all who are kept in confinement. .....The vulgar idea that criminals are abandoned and hardened beyond all possibility of amendment, appeared to him.....irrational and unchristian. He never despaired of the worst cases of moral corruption; but believed

> that regular employment, under strict superintendence, religious instruction, suitable rewards for good behaviour with penalties for sloth and refractoriness.....would reform the greatest criminals." 1

Again, in an extract taken from his journal, we find the fusion of these two strong elements underlying all his selfless labours:

> "And O, how should I bless God, if such a worm as I am can be made the instrument of alleviating the miseries of my fellow-creatures, and of exciting mankind, by mutual exertions for mutual relief, to connect more strongly the social bond by which they should ever be held together! If any individual has received good, spiritual good, by my labours, it is an honour for which I cannot be sufficiently thankful. But let us bless the Lord for all things." 2

It was Howard's hope that after his death, which occurred in 1790 in Russian Tartary where he was studying the plague, that some individual of a kindred spirit would follow up his labours until they were crowned with complete success. Unhappily, this was not to be until after the lapse of many years, when Mrs. Elizabeth Fry commenced her exertions, which, though on a limited scale compared with those of her predecessor,

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1. Farrar, Life of Howard, p. 87.
2. Taylor, Memoirs of John Howard, p. 389.

have been most effective.

Like all those who have wrought changes for the betterment of humanity, Elizabeth Fry was moved by a great love for her fellow-beings, greater than the prejudices and difficulties which lay in her way. She was moved to do something for the prisoners because she saw them as human beings just as she was, and because she felt that their degradation degraded humanity as a whole.

Despite the reforming zeal of Howard, little had occurred to make any basic difference in the English prison system. In most gaols the worst possible barbarity existed. Howard and his humane exertions appear to have been forgotten, and Acts of Parliament to have become almost a dead letter; some, if not all of the provisions of these Acts being, in the vast majority of gaols, openly violated. There seemed no public conscience at all in the matter. Mrs. Fry was drawn into battle against such heavy odds when she was informed of the terrible condition of the female prisoners in Newgate, and was induced to visit them as part of her Christian benevolence. This was in February 1813. Like her predecessor, she saw that idleness lay

at the root of many of their vices, and that if she could find some employment for them, hopes of thorough amendment were possible. In 1817 she resolved to form an Association for the improvement of the Female Prisoners in Newgate with these objects:

> "To provide for the clothing, instruction, and employment of the women; to introduce them to a knowledge of the Scriptures, and to form in them, as much as possible, those habits of sobriety, order, and industry which may render them docile and peaceable whilst in prison, and respectable when they leave it." 1

The Association consisted principally of members of the Society of Friends, who agreed that every day one or more of them should be present to give assistance to the prisoners. The method they employed and the amount of success which crowned their labours are clearly set forth in a letter Elizabeth Fry wrote to a certain Walter Venning, Esq., of St. Petersburg who was very interested in the welfare of the prisoners in that city. The letter was written in 1820, three years after the founding of the Association, and it shows that the interest and influence of Elizabeth Fry was not confined to the prisons of her native country. She says

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1. Render, Through Prison Bars, p. 112.

in part:

"We continue to have much satisfaction in the results of our efforts in Newgate; good order appears increasingly established, there is much cleanliness among our poor women, and some very encouraging proofs of reformation in habit, and what is much more, in heart. This, in a prison so ill arranged, with no classification, except tried from untried, no good inspection, and many other great disadvantages, is more than the zealous advocates of prison discipline could look for. We find the same favourable result follows the labours of several other Ladies' Associations in this kingdom; as I have the pleasure to state that in England, Scotland, and Ireland, many are now established. It may not be unseasonable to observe a few of the regulations that appear most important in maintaining good and orderly habits among female prisoners. In the first place, keeping them as much as possible under the care of women; more particularly having a head matron appointed who is not a prisoner; .....and who is an impartial representative of the Ladies' Committee,(on duty) both by night and day. Monitors from amongst themselves should superintend the different classes; daily giving an account of their conduct to the matron or visitors, which should be entered in a class book. The ladies here find much advantage in meeting once a month, to settle any business that may come before them. They then arrange their attendance for the month..... After reading the Scriptures, if there is the time, the ladies look over the register of the conduct of the women, and attend to their particular department; some to the children and adult schools; others to the accounts, clothing, or different sorts of work; for each has her particular business, by which means order is preserved amongst ourselves. .....As part of the women's earnings are allowed them, they have a little money to spend; a shop is therefore provided for them, where they may buy things at a fair market price, which prevents

> imposition, and also communication with those who are out of the prison." 1

Another activity which came under the attention of the Ladies' Newgate Association was the removal of the female convicts for transportation. It was a practice among the latter to riot, previous to their departure from Newgate, breaking windows, furniture, or whatever came within their reach. Those who had to travel to London from outlying prisons were not in a better state as Mrs. Fry's Memoir tells us.

> "They arrived from the country in small parties, at irregular intervals, having been conveyed on the outside of stage coaches, by smacks, or hoys, or any conveyance that offered, under the care of a turnkey;.....wayworn and ill;.....a small bundle of insufficient clothing being frequently the only preparation for the long voyage before them. In some instances, their children, equally destitute as themselves, accompanied them; in others, their sufferings were increased by sudden separation from their young infants..... In addition to these evils, the women were almost invariably more or less ironed, sometimes cruelly so." 2

To remedy the impossible conditions on board the female convict ships, Mrs. Fry classified the prisoners according to age and offence, obtained profitable

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1. Fry and Cresswell, Memoir of the Life of Elizabeth Fry, p. 382.
2. Ibid., p. 443 ff.

employment for them by the introduction of patchwork and appointed one of them to be school-mistress to the poor children. A reward was placed in the hands of the Captain to be given her provided she persevered in her duties to the end of the voyage.[1]

But greater evils awaited these poor women at the end of their voyage, hence Mrs. Fry's letter to the Right Honourable R.Wilmot Horton as late as 1823:

> "We (i.e. the Ladies) cannot but feel anxious that the care we extend to this degraded class of the community not only in the different prisons, but also on the voyage, should be rendered permanently beneficial, through the co-operation of government in the colonies. In the first place, we deem it expedient that a building be erected at Hobart Town for the reception of female convicts,..... That a respectable and judicious Matron be there stationed, to superintend the whole establishment under the direction of the Governor, or some magistrate appointed by him for that service. That part of the building be appropriated to the use of an adult and girls' school, and that school-mistresses be selected by the Matron from among the reformed prisoners, provided they be sufficiently qualified for the office. .....That those who merit a favourable report be selected, and allowed to be taken into service by the respectable inhabitants, under such restraints and regulations as may be considered needful. The others to remain confined; receiving at the same time suitable instruction, and employment, until they evince sufficient amendment in habits and dispositions, to warrant the grant of a similar indulgence." 2

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1. Fry and Cresswell, Memoir of the Life of Elizabeth Fry, p. 318.
2. Ibid., p. 450.

Needless to say, this letter was prompted by the horrible intelligence that until that time the poor voyagers had been inevitably thrown back upon vicious ways for the sake of bare shelter upon their arrival at their place of exile.

To realise in some measure the arduousness of the new task which Elizabeth Fry set herself and her helpers, it is necessary to consider two things - the disfavour in which the public work of women was then held, and the condition of English prison-life at the time. As to the first, it required a woman of extreme courage to face the prejudice existing; whilst in spite of the nation's having been aroused to the importance of the prison reform question by John Howard, the prisoners themselves were of the same degraded class as in his day - nor had Acts of Parliament been able greatly to raise the standard of prison officials. In any case the creation of this association constitutes one of the first efforts at organisation of the gaol reform movement, and this was the first of a long list of such associations founded and supported by a public with an expanding social consciousness. Among them were the Society for the Improvement of Prison Discipline and Reformation of Juvenile Offenders, founded by Mrs. Fry's

brother-in-law, Sir Fowell Buxton in 1815; the Nightly Shelter for the Homeless, the Guardian and Philanthropic Societies, Magdalen Refuges and other institutions in 1819-20; and the Ladies' British Society for Promoting the Reformation of Female Prisoners in 1821. By 1824, Shelters for discharged prisoners and a School of Discipline for the vicious and neglected girls in the London streets were already inaugurated. But neither these, nor any existing establishments, adequately met the needs of the many applicants discharged from the London prisons; and until some further refuge for such was established, the labour bestowed upon them during their imprisonment, had to remain, in too many instances, an incomplete work.

As an aid to novices in such activities, Mrs. Fry wrote and published, in 1827, a book under the title Observations on the Visiting, Superintending, and Government of Female Prisoners. It seems impossible to think of anything she had not already thought of, and acted upon, in her charitable occupations. The welfare of the poor, the abolition of slavery, the advancement of education, and the spreading of the teachings of Christ - all had her support. Howard, we remember, was also very close to the problem of the poor and their need of education.

Looking back on her achievements in her particular field of endeavour, William H. Render says in his book:

> "With the advent of Mrs. Fry, we find Parliament awake, if somewhat lethargic to the great work (of penal reform)..... In 1814 it enacted a Bill for the appointment of chaplains, which statute was followed by strenuous efforts in the House of Commons for the partial abolition of capital punishment. By the Gaol Acts of 1823-24, employment for prisoners was enforced; in 1832, hanging for forgery was abolished.....; in 1835, prison inspectors were appointed..... " 1

A great deal has been achieved, it is true, although more has yet to be done; and yet, one cannot help observing that though so very much was done within the short period of the second and third decades of the nineteenth century as compared with the long and frustrating period separating it from the year 1773 when Howard assumed his office as the sheriff of Bedfordshire, every little step of advancement towards the goal for which he struggled still points back to him as the one who did most to put the movement in action.

The labour in which Mrs. Fry and her friends were engaged, required great courage and energy, and, above all, a deep faith in the healing power of human

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1. Through Prison Bars, pp. 149-150.

compassion. In a letter, dated July, 1820, to Admiral Sir Thomas Byam Martin, Comptroller of the Navy from 1813 to 1832, who did so much to advance improvements in the female convict ships, Mrs. Fry says:

> "I believe kindness does more in turning them (i.e. the female convicts) from the error of their ways than harsh treatment; and that many a poor creature claims a compassion and a tenderness that is little known, but to those who visit prisons; as there are many of whom it may be said, that they are driven into guilt, and only want the way to be made open, to return with joy into the paths of virtue."

This should not be interpreted as begging for indulgences or unnecessary comforts for the poor women, a point Mrs. Fry was quick to make clear in the same letter; it is the sincere opinion of one who has studied the needs and ordeals of an unfortunate class of people most closely and minutely, so much so that even the House of Commons was ready to listen to and be guided by her evidence. To her mind, the best regulated and well-planned institution is but a body without a soul, whilst rules and regulations are enforced, unaccompanied by personal influence or individual communion. The prisoner, the lunatic, the hospital patient - her special charges - require these to touch the heart, to reach the mental malady, or give

confidence under suffering and painful treatment.

As her daughters say in their mother's Memoir:

> "Very frequently did Elizabeth Fry urge upon others the importance of these acts of benevolence. She believed that not merely were they blessed to the receiver; but to the giver 'twice blessed'. Earnest were her desires, and strong her hopes, that Englishmen, and English women, would increasingly awake to their responsibilities, that they would not rest content with subscribing of their abundance, or even of their penury, to refuges, to hospitals, and schools, but that they would give of that which is more precious - of time, sympathy, communion between man and man, and mind with mind." 1

This appeal of Elizabeth Fry for the "communion between man and man, and mind with mind" as essential to the remedy of a great national disgrace, what is this but another way of expressing Howard's constant endeavour "to connect more strongly the social bond by which they should ever be held together", that is, the unfortunate as well as the fortunate members of society. Coming from two people who have lived close to the pressing problems of life, this should not be dismissed as the meaningless foam of idealism or the fanatical outpouring of religious fervour. From our knowledge of John Howard and Elizabeth Fry, even from so condensed a survey as this, one should be able to

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1. Vol. II, p. 92.

dispel such thoughts at once. Besides, we are going to find that theirs was not an isolated discovery, but one that was shared by other serious-minded people.

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CHAPTER II.

WILBERFORCE AND CLARKSON.

In his book, Human Bondage in Southeast Asia, Bruno Lasker describes the practice of slavery as "the right to dispose over the life and labour of others". He says further that this right

> ".....is not always exercised with wanton brutality. It may crush the spirit of human beings and reduce them to bondage even though the provisions made for their material welfare may be adequate according to modest standards. An employer may yet use his power to deprive them of all initiative and of all responsible participation in decisions that affect them closely..... Under modern conditions such a relationship and such an attitude, no matter how greatly modified by paternalism, condemns those subjected to them to a life which, despite all outward appearance of cheerful acceptance, can be described only as hell on earth." [1]

Mr. Lasker is one who could easily sympathize with Wilberforce in his complaint that people wished only to be assured that the slaves were well treated, a question equally appropriate to cattle, and were too often blind or indifferent to their social condition.[2] This is a moral issue, and it provided the best argument against those who opposed Abolition and Emancipation on the

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1. Introduction, p. 10.
2. See Mathieson, British Slavery and its Abolition, p. 33.

grounds that not all masters were cruel and not all slaves were brutally treated, a point Wilberforce was always ready to admit. Still, we are concerned to note how it made itself heard, as a moral issue, in an era when slavery was considered as "the great pulley and support of the British plantation trade".[1]

In his biography of Wilberforce, Reginald Coupland tells us that:

> "About 1770, out of a rough total of 100,000 slaves exported annually from West Africa by traders of all nations, British ships were carrying from 40,000 to 60,000: and though the British figure dropped as the result of the American War, it was still the highest on the list in 1787, standing at 38,000, with France a good second at 31,000. Of the English ports engaged in the Trade, Liverpool easily held the lead, In 1771, for example, 107 ships cleared from Liverpool to carry 29,250 slaves, 58 from London to carry 8,136, 23 from Bristol to carry 8,810, 4 from Lancaster to carry 950. At the beginning of the nineteenth century, Liverpool had captured six-sevenths of the whole English trade with West Africa. The slaves were obtained in three ways - by direct seizure, by purchase from professional traders, or by barter from a chief." 2

In his book, The British Anti-Slavery Movement, he takes us to the scene of enslavement. The horror and brutality involved can be duly sensed only by a perusal of the

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1. Cunningham, Growth of English Industry and Commerce, p. 476.
2. Coupland, Wilberforce: a Narrative, p. 71.

actual passages.

> "Though doubtless some slave-traders were more brutal than others, the methods of the Trade as practised by all the maritime nations were much the same. In the early days slaves could be rounded up by sudden landings on the coast; but in time the natives learned to watch for the comings of the ships and take refuge in the bush; and, though adventurous traders sometimes penetrated inland themselves, their usual custom was to do business with professional native or half-caste dealers who took the cheap goods they had brought from Europe - cloth, beads, hardware, muskets and powder, spirit - and bartered them for slaves with chiefs up-country..... Enslavement within a tribe.....became the penalty for less and less serious offences, and intertribal warfare with slaves for its motive as well as kidnapping of women and children in peace-time became a more or less constant feature of African life..... Having bought his slaves, the dealer marshalled them, men, women and children, in a caravan for the march, sometimes a very long march to the coast. They were usually fettered to prevent escape and often locked in the "slave-stick" - a long pole with a crutch at the end for fastening round the neck. They carried on their heads the loads of foodstuffs and other baggage required for the journey or the ivory or other native produce which the dealer might have bought. The rigours of the march were often too much for the weaker members of the party. Slaves who fell sick were killed or left to die. The more frequented slave tracks were strewn with human bones." 1

Then came the voyage to the West Indies - the main centre of distribution - in disease-ridden

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1. Coupland, The British Anti-Slavery Movement, pp. 22-24.

ships where "they were sometimes packed so tightly that they could scarcely turn round". This is the notorious "Middle Passage" during which "at least one-sixth of a cargo died". Those who survived it were sold, but not before "wounds, caused by storm or ill-usage, were doctored up and, as far as possible, concealed". If, again, they survived this, there was yet "the first few months of employment.....known as the period of 'seasoning', and during it, no less..... than one-third of the novices failed to adjust themselves in body or spirit to the new conditions of climate or food or labour and died". Hence Coupland's statement that:

> "Taking all the deaths together - in the slave-catching wars or raids, on the march to the sea, during the 'Middle Passage' and in 'seasoning' - it has been moderately reckoned that for every African who became a 'seasoned' slave, at least one other African was killed". 1

And yet, this murderous trade was countenanced at home and abroad because British public opinion was not fully informed or impressed by the actual horrors. It could much more easily allow itself to be swayed by the standing material argument of the supporters

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1. Coupland, The British Anti-Slavery Movement, pp. 25-26.

of the trade, namely, that the loss of the American Colonies in 1783 accentuated the economic importance of the "sugar-islands" run on slave-labour, and that the abolition of the trade would mean the weakening of the mercantile marine so fully occupied with it - an impossible step in face of mounting American and French hostility. But this complacency was soon to be broken, for from early days planters on holiday or retiring to live in England had made a habit of bringing their domestic slaves with them. And with the slaves concrete evidence of what slavery meant was thrust under Englishmen's eyes. Slaves sometimes ran away and were hunted through the streets. Slave-auctions were advertised in the newspapers. Not only this, but slavery as a theme began to make its appearance in the literature of the day.

As early as 1680 we find Mrs. Aphra Behn's novel, Oroonoko, the Royal Slave. In the Introduction we are told that:

> "It has been said that 'Oroonoko is the first emancipation novel', and there is no little acumen in this remark..... (Mrs. Behn's) sympathy with the oppressed blacks, her deep emotions of pity for outraged humanity, her anger at the cruelties of the slave-driver aye ready with

knout or knife, are manifest in every line." 1

Not only this, but, in the course of her tale, we find the beginning of the new interest in the uncivilized people of the world, largely attributable to the publications of the travels and discoveries of Dampier, Tasman, Anson, Cook and others. We find in Mrs. Behn the foreshadowing of the conception of an ideal "state of nature" that was to be popularized by Rousseau. She says of the natives of Surinam, Guiana, where the tale was set;

> "These People represented to me an absolute Idea of the first state of Innocence, before Man knew how to sin: And 'tis most evident and plain, that simple Nature is the most harmless, inoffensive and virteous (sic) Mistress. 'Tis she alone, if she were permitted, that better instructs the World, than all the Inventions of Man: Religion would here but destroy that Tranquility they possess by Ignorance; and Laws would but teach 'em to know Offences, of which now they have no Notion." 2

The novel is full of horrors and tortures, and yet not without its ludicrous aspect, as for instance the following shocking incident:

"They told us by our Interpreter, that

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1. Behn, Oroonoko, Introduction, p. 127.
2. Behn, op. cit., pp. 131-2.

> when any War was waging, two Men, chosen out by some old Captain whose fighting was past, and who could only teach the Theory of War, were to stand in Competition for the General-ship, or great War-Captain; and being brought before the old Judges, now past Labour, they are ask'd, What they dare to do, to shew they are worthy to lead an Army? When he who is ask'd, making no Reply, cuts off his Nose, and throws it contemptibly on the Ground; and the other does something to himself that he thinks surpasses him, and perhaps deprives himself of Lips and an Eye: So they slash on 'till one gives out, and many have dy'd in this Debate. And it's by a passive Valour they shew and prove their Activity." 1

This shows that Mrs. Behn was aware of the disadvantageous as well as the advantageous aspects of the simplicity of their nature. And yet, on the whole, it is a very sympathetic study and that she succeeds in conveying the bitterness in their souls is indicated by Oroonoko's choice of words when he was trying to incite his fellow-sufferers to an insurrection:

> "(He) made an Harangue to 'em, of the Miseries and Ignominies of Slavery: counting up all their Toils and Sufferings, under such Loads, Burdens and Drudgeries, as were fitter for Beasts than Men; senseless Brutes, than human Souls. He told 'em, it was not for Days, Months or Years, but for Eternity; there was no End to be of their Misfortunes: They suffer'd not like Men, who might find a Glory and Fortitude in Opression; but like Dogs, that loved the Whip and Bell, and fawn'd the more they were beaten: That they had lost the divine

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1. Behn, Oroonoko, p. 188.

> Quality of Men, and were become insensible Asses, fit only to bear: Nay, worse; an Ass, or Dog, or Horse, having done his Duty, could lie down in Retreat, and rise to work again, and while he did his Duty, endur'd no stripes; but Men, villanous, senseless Men, such as they, toil'd on all the tedious week 'till BLACK FRIDAY; and then, whether they work'd or not, whether they were faulty or meriting, they, promiscuously, the Innocent with the Guilty, suffer'd the infamous Whip, the sordid Stripes, from their Fellow-Slaves, 'till their Blood trickled from all Parts of their Body; Blood, whose every Drop ought to be revenged with a Life of some of those tyrants that impose it." 1

But not all writers on the poor Africans shared Mrs. Behn's sentiment. In James Thomson's poem "The Seasons" which appeared nearly half a century later, we find a pitying reference to them. In this passage, Thomson shows himself to be too conscious of the civilization he enjoyed and, apart from what he must have read or heard about their brutal nature, not sufficiently acquainted with the truth about his subject.

> "Ill-fated race! the softening arts of peace,
> Whate'er the humanizing muses teach,
> The godlike wisdom of the tempered breast,
> Progressive truth, the patient force of thought,
> Investigation calm whose silent powers
> Command the world, the light that leads to Heaven,
> Kind equal rule, the government of laws,
> And all-protecting freedom which alone
> Sustains the name and dignity of man -

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1. Behn, Oroonoko, pp. 190-191.

These are not theirs. The parent sun himself
Seems o'er this world of slaves to tyrannize,
And, with oppressive ray the roseate bloom
Of beauty blasting, gives the gloomy hue
And feature gross - or, worse, to ruthless deeds,
Mad jealousy, blind rage, and fell revenge
Their fervid spirit fires. Love dwells not there,
The soft regards, the tenderness of life,
The heart-shed tear, the ineffable delight
Of sweet humanity: these court the beam
Of milder climes - in selfish fierce desire
And the wild fury of voluptuous sense
There lost....." 1

I much prefer the reference we find in Alexander Pope's "Essay on Man", even on the basis of sentiments alone:

"Lo, the poor Indian, whose untutor'd mind
Sees God in clouds, or hears him in the wind:
His soul, proud Science never taught to stray
Far as the solar walk, or milky way;
Yet simple Nature to his hope has giv'n,
Behind the cloud topt hill, an humbler heav'n;
Some safer world in depth of woods embrac'd,
Some happier island in the watery waste,
Where slaves once more their native Land behold
No fiends torment, no christian thirst for gold." 2

Pope's poem was published in 1733-4. About this time, Richard Savage published a poem entitled, "Of Public Spirit in regard to Public Works: An Epistle to H.R.H. Frederick, Prince of Wales", which contains towards the end an attack upon the slave trade, as well

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1. Thomson, "Summer", lines 875-896.
2. Epistle I, lines 99-108.

as a warning of the downfall of those who participate in it. Another poem I should like to draw attention to, as indicative of the various treatments of the same theme, is William Shenstone's Elegy, XX, with the long and rather ridiculous exposition at the beginning wherein he says that he intends to "compare his humble fortune with the distress of others; and his subjection to Delia with the miserable servitude of an African slave". And yet the pathos and sarcasm which Shenstone puts into the mouth of his slave are very real:

> "Why am I ravish'd from my native strand?
> What savage race protects this impious gain?
> Shall foreign plagues infect this teeming land,
> And more than seaborn monsters plough this main?.....
> When the grim Lion urged his cruel chase,
> When the stern Panther sought his midnight prey,
> What fate reserved me for this Christian race?
> A race more polish'd, more severe than they!" 1

Even from the field of political economy, Adam Smith denounces slavery because "the wear and tear of a slave.....is at the expense of his master.....(and), accordingly, from the experience of all ages and nations, (he believes) that the work done by freemen comes cheaper

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1. Shenstone, The Poetical Works of William Shenstone, with Life, Critical Dissertation, and Explanatory Notes by the Rev.G. Gilfillan, p. 46.

in the end than that performed by slaves". [1] Meanwhile, he urges better treatment of the slaves, because:

> "Gentle usage renders the slave not only more faithful, but more intelligent, and therefore, upon a double account, more useful. He approaches more to the condition of a free servant, and may possess some degree of integrity and attachment to his master's interest, virtues which frequently belong to free servants, but which never can belong to a slave who is treated as slaves commonly are in countries where the master is perfectly free and secure." [2]

It is not hard to imagine the influence of such a piece of argument in serious circles.

Adam Smith's book was published in 1776. This is an important year in the history of the Abolition Movement for in that year the Society of Friends imposed manumission upon any members of their Society who possessed slaves, on pain of expulsion; previously, and in 1774, a decree of expulsion was passed on any Friend who persisted in having dealings with the trade. The initiation of the anti-slavery movement is the greatest debt that the world owes to the Society of Friends, for till then we find the expressions of individual opinions only, repudiating slavery as an

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1. Smith, The Wealth of Nations, Vol. I, p. 72.
2. Ibid., Vol. II, pp. 84-85.

inhuman and unchristian practice, from the fields of literature, philosophy, and theology.

Meanwhile, as I have shown, concrete evidence of what slavery meant was being thrust under the people's eyes by the slaves actually brought to England by their owners; the brutalities involved - though not general, for masters could be humane as well as cruel - shocked a few into protestation at such happenings on British soil. Foremost among the latter we find the first of the Abolitionists, Granville Sharp.

By sheer persistence and undaunted courage, Sharp succeeded in forcing the Lord Chief Justice Mansfield, presiding over the case of a master's claim to a captured runaway called James Somerset, to deliver the following judgment, on 22nd June, 1772:

> "The power claimed never was in use here nor acknowledged by the law..... The state of slavery.....is so odious that nothing can be suffered to support it but positive law. Whatever inconvenience may follow from the decision, I cannot say this case is allowed or approved by the law of England; and therefore the black must be discharged." 1

Followed to its logical conclusion, this judgment prohibited slavery in the British Isles, for it

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1. Coupland, The British Anti-Slavery Movement, p. 55.

was directed against any forcible retention of a slave by his or her master. Not only this, it brought about an increasingly popular opinion that only an illogical morality could outlaw slavery in Britain because it was so odious, and tolerate it on British soil overseas where the mass of slaves were far worse treated.

On the other hand we have the economic and political argument of the supporters of the trade (notwithstanding Adam Smith's enquiry). To oppose this, it was again the Quakers who initiated an organized attack through a group of individual assailants, among whom we find Thomas Clarkson, who was to do as much as any man to secure the triumph of the cause. Thus, on 22nd May, 1787, a committee of twelve was formed and it declared as its object, the procurement and publication of such information as might tend to the abolition of the slave-trade, and to secure the support of Parliament for such activities, as it was clear by now to one and all that the trade could only be truly abolished by new legislation, since there was nothing actually illegal in it.[1] To achieve this second point, a man of calibre comparable to Burke, Fox and Pitt had to be found to push their cause in

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1. Coupland, The British Anti-Slavery Movement, p. 68.

the House. It had to be someone who was neither a Whig nor a Tory, for assailants as well as supporters of Abolition were to be found in both parties. The choice fell on William Wilberforce, a particularly close friend of the Prime Minister, William Pitt, an excellent debater with an unusual gift of natural eloquence and charm, and a fervent Evangelical. His is the name with which the abolition of the British slave system and the consolidation of the British humanitarian tradition is mainly associated.

Wilberforce, though often collaborating with Clarkson, formed his own Evangelical group of Abolitionists called the Clapham Sect. It was a remarkable fraternity because of its close relationship. It not only lived for the most part in one little village; it had one character, one mind, and one way of life because of the faith as well as the interests shared, e.g., the welfare of the poor, the spreading of their faith. And, as if to make them still more like a single family, they were interlinked by marriage. A number of them sat in Parliament where they were given the half-mocking and half-respectful nickname of "the Saints", because of their selfless devotion to high causes, their lack of all personal ambition, their

scrupulous honesty and candour, and their frank appeal to conscience and Christianity. All these gave them an independence which made them so great a force not only in Parliament - and we must remember that Parliament was not so responsible to public opinion then as now - but also outside it. With them, humanitarianism may be said to have descended en masse upon the political field.

It was Wilberforce's parliamentary talents that, linked with Clarkson's industry and propaganda of the Abolitionist Committee, made it possible to open the great attack upon the slave-trade. In doing this they had in mind the eventual destruction of the slave system itself which the trade supplied and sustained. From the outset there was a positive side to their policy. It was not enough, they felt, to stop injuring the Africans: an attempt should be made to help them. This attempt was based upon three distinct but inter-related lines of activity - religious conversion, commerce and colonization.

The campaign against the slave trade may be said to have begun when in the autumn of 1787 Clarkson set out on the first of his many journeys of investigation. On such journeys, he visited the three leading

ports engaged in the diabolical trade - Bristol, Liverpool and Lancaster. He boarded slave-ships, and measured the quarters provided for slaves. He checked the muster-rolls to establish the high proportion of deaths among the English crews. He obtained specimens of instruments of torture used on the slaves - shackles, thumbscrews and mouth-openers. He asked questions of everyone concerned with the trade, and naturally he provoked resentment and hostility. But Clarkson never lacked courage. He never allowed anything to interfere with his enquiries, except for the severe nervous breakdown he suffered in the spring of 1794, which forced his retirement until the winter of 1815. This illness was brought about, not only because in the last few years his mind had been constantly engaged by the sordid horrors of the trade - an unhealthy occupation for any mind - but also because he was especially harassed by a sense of responsibility for the misfortunes of many of the witnesses whom he had personally persuaded to give evidence. From a case, he always returned to London with deadly evidence, including the said informants from the slave-ports. When not busy gathering information and evidence, Clarkson employed his time creating local

centres of Abolitionist opinion in the provinces and writing on the evils of the slave-trade. It is well to note here that without Clarkson's unflagging enthusiasm and relentless driving of himself all over the country on his highly dangerous errand, the attack on the British slave system could not have achieved its object as quickly or as fully as it did. On top of it all, he was a poor man and could ill afford to spend his days in pure philanthropy. This only shows that he really gave his all to the cause of humanity. Of this we shall have more to say when we come to the second phase of the Abolitionists' struggle, wherein they concentrated their attack upon slavery itself. In Clarkson's journeys to the various slave centres, I see again the figure of John Howard, and his visits to the prison-world of Europe, and recall the latter's words, so pertinent to the former's case: "I am the plodder, who goes about to collect materials for men of genius to make use of". [1]

While Clarkson was making his round of the slave-ports, Wilberforce was also hard at work, preparing himself for his rôle in Parliament. This meant reading all he could find on the slave-trade, talking to London business-men concerned in it, and discussing

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1. Aiken, A View of the Character and Public Services of the Late John Howard, Esq., p. 227.

it with his political friends, especially Pitt. It meant the drafting of numberless speeches, moving of numerous resolutions and bills, studying the Reports of Privy Councils, facing a tirade of violent protests and queries from members of the House who represented the interests of the trade, and carrying on in spite of groundless personal calumny and slander, even threats to his life, and in spite of his constant ill-health. The core of the resistance to the cause he represented lay in the traditional dislike of drastic changes and traditional respect for the rights of property, innate in Englishmen. Still, he had the support of the best minds of the House - Pitt, Burke and Fox: of the four, Pitt alone did not live to see the trade abolished in 1807, after having done so much to bring about its destruction. It was Pitt who, in the absence of an ailing Wilberforce, moved the first resolution in the House of Commons on May 9th, 1788, binding it to consider the Slave Trade early in the next session. After his recovery, however, Wilberforce assumed the leadership of a cause which was to meet with innumerable defeats but also with ultimate victory. The Abolitionists never slackened in their task of mobilizing public opinion against an antagonistic

Parliament. As Coupland says:

> "The propaganda organized by the Committee was already bearing fruit. Pamphlets on the horrors of the Trade and reprints of the debates in Parliament had been widely distributed. A poem by Cowper, The Negro's Complaint, had been set to music and thousands of copies of it circulated. A Cameo depicting a Negro in an attitude of entreaty had been designed by Wedgewood, the famous master-potter and an ardent Abolitionist, and widely adopted for decorating snuff-boxes, bracelets and hairpins. A campaign was launched, not unsuccessfully, to encourage the consumption of East Indian sugar instead of the slave-grown West Indian product. And the outcome of all this had been a great increase in the number of English men and women who knew the black facts of the Trade and wanted to stop it. All that was needed, therefore, was to canalize this current of public opinion and bring it to bear in full volume upon Parliament." 1

That the Abolitionists succeeded in doing this is shown by the fact that only twenty years after the campaign had started, while the war with France still continued and was in a critical phase, a commercial organization, so great and old-established, so immensely profitable, buttressed by such powerful vested interests and regarded so recently as a permanent, if regrettable, necessity of European civilization, was destroyed. How was this possible? Because from the moment the British people had been fully and authori-

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1. The British Anti-Slavery Movement, pp. 93-94.

tatively informed of the black truth about the trade, Abolition sooner or later was certain. And it would have come sooner, despite the initial success of the obstructive strategy employed by representatives of the trade in Parliament, if the first popular impulse had not been confused and checked by the counter-impulse exerted by Jacobinism and the Revolutionary War. As it was, though the conviction of sin had been thrust into a corner of the nation's mind during the years of fighting, it had not been eradicated; and, all the while, it had been kept alive by the quiet propaganda of the Abolitionists. The literature about the trade had steadily increased. The outspoken opinions of high-minded men all over the country had worked silently on their neighbours' thoughts, among them those of Dr. Samuel Johnson, whose zeal against slavery in every form is reflected in his benevolence towards his faithful negro slave, Francis Barber, his outspoken support of the negroes' cause in the West Indies and America, and the long passage he dictated to Boswell, his biographer, in the form of an argument in favour of one, Richard Knight, negro, who was fighting for his liberty in a Scottish court.[1] Almost every year men had read

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1. Boswell, Life of Samuel Johnson, Vol. II, pp. 733-5.

in the newspapers the report of Wilberforce's motion. Moreover, the anti-Jacobin fury gradually spent itself and they were ready to turn their minds to the question of reform without seeing a red streak of Republicanism in every suggested humane measure.

The same tactics were to lead to the final abolition of slavery itself in the colonies against violent opposition from the Colonial Assemblies in 1834. This second part of the campaign was opened by a substantial pamphlet written by Wilberforce, and published two years after his retirement from active leadership of the cause in Parliament - a retirement enforced by ill-health. It was entitled An Appeal to the Religion, Justice and Humanity of the Inhabitants of the British Empire in behalf of the Negro Slaves in the West Indies. It appeared in May, 1823.

The anti-slavery crusaders were accused, not always without justice, of painting the results of emancipation in too gorgeous colours. But Wilberforce's idealism was not untempered by common sense. He certainly believed that the freed slaves would become an industrious, prosperous, and relatively civilized peasantry. Experience sometimes showed that he underestimated the time this transformation would take, as for instance in the establishment of the Sierra Leone

settlement, but it also proved that his was not altogether a fanatic's dream. Wilberforce believed in the providential progress of the human family: it was a belief strongly founded upon his faith. In living that faith, he never gave a thought to his own health or his own worldly goods. It was not for nothing that he was given such titles as "Saint" and even "Keeper of the Nation's Conscience"; for he was founding in the conscience of the British people a tradition of humanity and of responsibility towards the weak and backward people whose fate lay in their hands. And that tradition has never died.

What about his partner in this glorious enterprise? The man whom Samuel Taylor Coleridge once referred to as "the moral Steam-Engine, or the Giant with one idea"? Steady, methodical, painstaking and tireless in his endeavours, no task was ever too irksome or too onerous for Clarkson. He was filled with an almost fanatical devotion to the cause of the oppressed Africans. In the second phase of the Abolitionist struggle, he did his usual more than human share of the most exacting and dangerous part of the work. And yet, it is not this that I carry in my mind after following the crusade to its victorious end. Rather, it is his

living up to the letter of the humanitarian spirit in his kindness and solicitude for the widow and daughters of the negro king of Haiti, the unfortunate King Henry Christophe. The latter was greatly aided, both by Wilberforce and Clarkson, in his valiant effort to set up a negro state and to prove to the world that civilization as a blessing is not a prerogative of the fair races. As Earl Leslie Griggs and Clifford H. Prator say in their book:

> "The death of Christophe and the overthrow of the kingdom were matters of bitter regret to Clarkson. Not only were the brilliant projects of the former king laid in ruins, but Clarkson and other friends of the Africans in England had lost in the wreck of Christophe's well-organized government their opportunity to prove to the world what a free and independent Negro state could accomplish. The letters Clarkson received from Haiti were most depressing. They give a graphic account of Christophe's illness, the insurrections, the death of the King, and the final destruction of the monarchy, and show how every beneficial aspect of the royal régime - the improvement of agriculture, the development of education, and the prosperity of the nation - rapidly disappeared." 1

Meanwhile, no-one seemed to care about the widowed queen and her daughters, the princesses. Only Clarkson proved himself a friend in word as well as in

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1. Griggs and Prator, Henry Christophe and Thomas Clarkson: A Correspondence, p. 77.

deed. He wrote to the late King's minister and also to the then victorious President Boyer about their welfare. His concern decided the unfortunate ladies to seek refuge in England. Griggs and Prator continue:

> "The arrival of Madame Christophe and her two daughters in England placed the abolitionists in a new position. Heretofore their efforts had been at a distance; now they were confronted with the care of these unfortunate women. 'I saw the ex-queen of Hayti yesterday and her two daughters,' wrote Zachary Macaulay to his wife on 20th September, 1821:
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> 'She and they are in deep mourning, which, with their coal-black countenances gives them a somewhat sombre aspect. The mother is, I should think, about fifty-five years of age, pleasing and modest. The daughters are, I should think twenty-four and eighteen, pretty good looking, but you need be under no apprehensions respecting Madame Christophe. She is not likely to come near us'." 1

Even Wilberforce proved unequal to the occasion - perhaps owing to ill-health, since the arrival of the ladies was not long after his retirement from active leadership in the Abolition struggle. As he says in a letter to Mrs. Clarkson, dated March 11th, 1822, from London:

> "I am sure I should be cordially glad

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1. Griggs and Prator, op. cit., p. 74.

to render them any benefit, and so would Mrs. W. also. But I have no time to spare, and she has not at present spirits to undertake an office which would require a considerable share of them."

Griggs and Prator add that there was, further,

".....as Clarkson himself remarked, a sort of shrink at admitting them into high society, but he and his wife shared none of this prejudice and hospitably received them as house guests for nearly a year. 'Their amiable dispositions, their gentle and correct manners, and their enlightened minds' soon won the affection of the Clarksons." 1

Nowhere does Clarkson's altruism show to better advantage than in his activities on behalf of the Christophes. If one's judgment may be based upon single actions, for this action alone, he deserves to be considered the first of the humanitarians.

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1. Griggs and Prator, op. cit., p. 79.

CHAPTER III.

RICHARD LOVELL EDGEWORTH.

It is seldom indeed that we come across a character like Mr. Edgeworth. One cannot help being amused - though without disparagement - by the many contradictory features of his life and personality; his mechanical ingenuity, his rôle as an able, courageous and judicious landlord, and his pre-eminence as a practical educationist, as contrasted with his oratorical verbosity, his abounding self-confidence and self-complacency, his officious curiosity and his character as an absolute bore, as given by some uncharitable acquaintances. And yet, our opinion of one, highly esteemed by eminent personages of the political, social and academical circles of his own day, should not be made lightly.

It would be impossible in such a short sketch, and irrelevant to my research, to touch on every aspect of Mr. Edgeworth's varied and interesting life. Take for instance his mechanical ingenuity and the eccentric form in which it expressed itself. Mr. Edgeworth tells us:

> "During my residence at Hare Hatch, (a) wager was proposed by me among (my) acquaintance, the purport of which was, that I undertook to find a man, who should, with the assistance of machinery, walk faster than any other person that could be produced. The machinery which I intended to employ was a huge hollow wheel made very light, within side of which, in a barrel of six feet diameter, a man should walk. Whilst he stepped thirty inches, the circumference of the large wheel, or rather wheels, would revolve five feet on the ground; and as the machine was to roll on planks, and on a plane somewhat inclined, when once the vis inertiae of the machine should be overcome, it would carry on the man within it, as fast as he could possibly walk. I had provided means of regulating the motion, so that the wheel should not run away with its master." 1

Unfortunately, it did "run away with its master" when it was tried by "some idle curious persons" before it was properly finished, and, tumbling into a chalk-pit, was smashed to pieces. Again:

> "I was riding one day in a country, that was enclosed by walls of an uncommon height; and upon its being asserted that it would be impossible for a person to leap such walls, I offered for a wager to produce a wooden horse, that should carry me safely over the highest wall in the country. It struck me that, if a machine were made with eight legs, four only of which should stand upon the ground at one time; if the remaining four were raised up into the body of the machine, and if this body were divided into two parts, sliding, or rather rolling on cylinders, one of the parts, and the legs belonging to it, might in two efforts be projected over the wall by a person in the machine, and the legs belonging to this part might be let down to the ground,

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1. Edgeworth, Memoirs of Richard Lovell Edgeworth, (begun by himself and concluded by his daughter, Maria Edgeworth), Vol. I, pp. 149-50

> and then the other half of the machine might have its legs drawn up, and be projected over the wall, and so on alternately." 1

Unfortunately, Mr. Edgeworth wasn't satisfied with the models which he produced of this machine. Still, his own words on this occasion are:

> "As an encouragement to perseverance, I assure my readers that I never lost sight of this scheme during forty years; that I have made considerably above one hundred working models upon this principle, in a great variety of forms; and that, although I have not yet been able to accomplish my project, I am still satisfied that it is feasible." 2

At one stage his inventive energy carried him as far as France where he wished to help to enlarge the city of Lyons by changing the course of the Rhone.[3]

It would be most unfair, however, to think that Mr. Edgeworth's mechanical talents were only occupied with clever and amusing but completely useless or senseless projects. A glance through his Memoirs will prove to us the high regard in which he was held by the Societies of Science and Arts of his day, both by virtue of his contributions to their fund of knowledge and his more incredible projects (such as an umbrella for

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1. Edgeworth, Memoirs of Richard Lovell Edgeworth, Vol. I, pp. 169-70
2. Ibid., p. 171.
3. Ibid., p. 265 ff.

covering a haystack).[1] Faced with a life of such abounding detail, I propose, therefore, to confine my survey of it to two main topics, viz., his contribution to the world of education, and to the welfare of the poor within his reach.

Mr. Edgeworth married very young, and being under the influence of Rousseau's Emile, he decided to educate his young son according to certain principles set down in that book. In his own words as found in the Memoirs, begun by himself and concluded by his daughter, Maria Edgeworth, the novelist, he says:

> "The body and mind of my son were to be left as much as possible to the education of nature and of accident. .....I succeeded in making him remarkably hardy; I also succeeded in making him fearless of danger, and, what is more difficult, capable of bearing privation of every sort. He had all the virtues of a child bred in the hut of a savage, and all the knowledge of THINGS, which could well be acquired at an early age by a boy bred in civilized society. .....Of books he had less knowledge at four or five years old, than most children have at that age. Of mechanics he had a clearer conception, and in the application of what he knew more invention than any child I had seen. He was bold, free, fearless, generous; he had a ready and keen use of all his senses, and of his judgment. But he was not disposed to OBEY:....he had too little deference for others, and he showed an invincible dislike to control." 2

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1. Edgeworth, Memoirs of Richard Lovell Edgeworth, Vol. I, p. 172.
2. Ibid., p. 178 f.

Of such a boy, Rousseau - when Mr. Edgeworth took his son to him and asked for an opinion - said that "as far as he could judge from two hours' observation, he thought him a boy of abilities, which had been well cultivated". The child appears to have been quite a phenomenon in his own day, but that his father was to question his own wisdom in bringing up his first-born in such a revolutionary manner can be surmised from the very different way in which he brought up the rest of his numerous children.

Mr. Edgeworth believed that "if the faculty of attention be early cultivated on any one subject, this power may be turned afterwards successfully to whatever object is desired.....".[1] It was also his principle "to excite the attention fully and strongly for a short time, and never to go to the point of fatigue".[2]

These two are, I think, the basic principles he followed in cultivating the understanding of his children. Further on in the Memoirs, Maria says that "in the education of the heart, his warmth of approbation, and strength of indignation, had powerful and salutary influence in touching and developing affections".

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1. Edgeworth, Memoirs of Richard Lovell Edgeworth, Vol. II, p. 125.
2. Ibid, p. 182.

Mr. Edgeworth wrote a substantial amount on education and we know, to his credit, that he never recommended any thing to the public till he had put it to the test of experience in the education of his own children. Of this, Maria says:

> "I claim for my father the merit of having been the first to recommend, both by example and precept, what Bacon would call the experimental method in education. If I were obliged to rest on any single point, my father's credit as a lover of truth, and his utility as a philanthropist and a philosophical writer, it should be on his having made this first record of experiments in education. The example, which he has set, has been followed in some families, and will be followed in others, by parents who are really anxious to know and improve the dispositions of their children, and to instruct themselves in the methods of cultivating their understandings and hearts." 1

This passage not only lays a claim to fame for Mr. Edgeworth, but also indicates the responsible rôle he thinks parents should assume in the intellectual and moral upbringing of their children.

Practical Education, which lays down his principles in the education of children, was written in conjunction with his daughter, Maria. It was published in 1798. The Preface contains some important clarifications and says in part:

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1. Edgeworth, Memoirs of Richard Lovell Edgeworth, Vol. II, p. 185 ff.

> "We have no temptation to attack the theories of others; and we have chosen the title of Practical Education, to point out that we rely entirely upon practice and experience..... On religion and politics we have been silent, because we have no ambition to gain partizans, or to make proselytes, and because we do not address ourselves exclusively to any sect or to any party. The scrutinizing eye of criticism, in looking over our table of contents, will also, probably, observe that there are no chapters on courage and chastity. To pretend to teach courage to Britons would be as ridiculous as it is unnecessary; and, except amongst those who are exposed to the contagion of foreign manners, we may boast of the superior delicacy of our fair countrywomen; a delicacy acquired from domestic example, and confirmed by public approbation."

A foreigner reading thus far and no further would most certainly go away with a nasty sense of smug insularity, but for those who have been prepared with a good knowledge of Mr. Edgeworth's individuality in both outlook and action, the thing to do is to read on. The authors continue:

> "When a book appears under the name of two authors, it is natural to enquire what share belongs to each of them. All that relates to the art of teaching to read, in the chapter on Tasks, the chapter on Grammar and Classical Literature, Geography, Chronology, Arithmetic, Geometry, and Mechanicks, were written by Mr. Edgeworth, and the rest of the book by Miss Edgeworth."

Practical Education shows a wide and exhaustive range of study and experience in the care and development of children up to early youth, supplemented

by a thorough knowledge of all the educational methods and theories then countenanced. Above all, the whole treatise is permeated by a humane understanding of the peculiar problems and needs of young minds and of human nature in general. Thus we read in the chapter on Tasks:

> "We see but few examples of children so extremely stupid as not to have been able to learn to read and write between the years of three and thirteen; but we see many whose temper and whose understanding have been materially injured by premature, or injudicious instruction; we see many who are disgusted, perhaps irrecoverably, with literature, whilst they are fluently reading books which they cannot comprehend, or learning words by rote, to which they affix no ideas. It is scarcely worth to speak of the vain ambition of those, who long only to have it said that their children read sooner than those of their neighbours do; for supposing their utmost wish to be gratified, that their son could read before the age when children commonly gesticulate, still the triumph must be of short duration, the fame confined to a small circle of foes and friends, and probably in a few years the memory of the phenomenon would remain only with his doting grandmother. Surely it is the use which children make of their acquirements which is of consequence, not the possessing them a few years sooner or later." 1

Then follows some very careful and clear instruction on teaching a child to read. Even here, the disposition of the teacher - preferably the mother - is still a matter of first concern to Mr. Edgeworth, for he stops

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1. Edgeworth, Practical Education, p. 39.

to say:

> "And here at the first step we must entreat the teacher to have patience, to fix firmly in her mind; we say HER mind, because we address ourselves to mothers; that it is immaterial whether a child learns this alphabet in six weeks or in six months; at all events, let it not be inculcated with restraint, or made tiresome, lest it should retard the whole progress of the pupil. We do not mean to recommend the custom of teaching in play, but surely a cheerful countenance is not incompatible with application." 1

After dealing with the first difficulties of reading, Mr. Edgeworth passes on to those of writing and spelling. Before leaving this particular chapter, however, I should like to bring in yet another passage in which Mr. Edgeworth further expatiates on the proper approach towards young minds:

> "When we speak of rendering literature agreeable to children, and of the danger of associating pain with the sight of a book, or with the sound of the word Task, we should at the same time avoid the error of those who in their first lessons accustom their pupils to so much amusement that they cannot help afterwards feeling disgusted with the sobriety of instruction. It has been the fashion of late to attempt teaching every thing to children in play, and ingenious people have contrived to insinuate much useful knowledge without betraying the design to instruct; but this system cannot be pursued beyond certain bounds without many inconveniencies. The habit of being amused not only increases the desire for amusement, but it lessens

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1. Edgeworth, Practical Education, p. 44 ff.

> even the relish for pleasure; so that the mind becomes passive and indolent, and a course of perpetually increasing stimulus is necessary to awaken attention..... The truth is, that useful knowledge cannot be obtained without labour, that attention long continued is laborious, but that without this labour nothing excellent can be accomplished. Excite a child to attend in earnest for a short time, his mind will be less fatigued, and his understanding will be more improved, than if he had exerted but half the energy twice as long: the degree of pain which he may have felt will be amply and properly compensated by his success; this will not be an arbitrary variable reward, but one within his own power, and that can be ascertained by his own feelings." 1

In the chapter on Grammar and Classical Literature, Mr. Edgeworth criticizes various extant texts, soundly and most appropriately, judging from the examples he quotes. As in the case of the chapter already quoted from, and all those which follow it, the instructions he gives are here made as clear as can be and are always based upon his fundamental principle, namely, the proper development and employment of the faculty of attention. The many repetitions may seem uncalled for, if not entirely superfluous, and yet, the attention accorded Practical Education at the time of its publication by both British and Continental educationists seems to show that it definitely answered a need, however absurd the latter may appear today when

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1. Edgeworth, Practical Education, p. 53, ff.

too many things are taken for granted in the field of education.

We should notice that the time when it was published witnessed the deepest decline of grammar and public schools. Not only was the instruction they offered restricted to the narrow classical curriculum imposed by their foundation statutes, but in the words of S.J.Curtis:

> "The moral state of the schools came in for sharp criticism..... The life of the pupils was rough and brutal..... Even in the best schools the administration was chaotic, the school understaffed, and the boarding arrangements most unsatisfactory. The food was often scanty and ill-cooked. After lesson periods little supervision was exercised by the masters. In some schools, after prep., the boys were driven into the dormitories, the doors locked and not opened until it was time to rise for morning meal and school. Bullying and fagging were almost universal. .....Discipline was usually maintained by flogging..... An age (i.e., the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries) which began with the use of the pillory and stocks for minor offences, and hanged the small pilferer; which later sanctioned transportation to Botany Bay and suffered the sight of the bodies of criminals hanging on gibbets, was not likely to be unduly disturbed by the flogging of schoolboys..... " 1

We shall hear more in this strain when we come to the reminiscences or comments of the poets (and particularly those of Cowper) upon their own schooldays. Meanwhile.

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1. Curtis, History of Education in Great Britain, pp. 62-63.

we cannot help but admire what must have seemed the revolutionary - because humane and wise - attitude that Mr. Edgeworth was advocating for teachers.

It is greatly to Mr. Edgeworth's credit that his worth as an educationist was apparent not only to his equals, but to his own pupils. As Maria, his daughter, says of him:

> "He knew so exactly the habits, powers, and knowledge of his pupils, that he seldom failed in estimating what each could comprehend or accomplish. He saw at once where their difficulties lay, and knew how far to assist, how far to urge the mind, and where to leave it entirely to its own exertion. His patience in teaching was peculiarly meritorious, I may say surprising, in a man of his vivacity. He would sit quietly while a child was thinking of the answer to a question, without interrupting, or suffering it to be interrupted, and would let the pupil touch and quit the point repeatedly; and without a leading observation or exclamation, he would wait till the steps of reasoning and invention were gone through, and were converted into certainties. This was sometimes trying to the patience of the bystanders, who often decided that the question was too difficult; when just at the moment that the silence and suspense could be no longer endured, his judgment has been justified, and his forbearance rewarded, by the child's giving a perfectly satisfactory answer." 1

In 1802, he published Poetry Explained for Young People; in 1808, Professional Education, a book which was instructive for parents as well as masters helping a child

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1. Edgeworth, Memoirs of Richard Lovell Edgeworth, Vol. II, p. 181 ff.

to choose a career, and which disproves the assumption that he was averse to the public education of children; in 1816, Readings on Poetry; and at various times, different parts of Early Lessons. He also explained and illustrated his method of teaching to read, in a small tract called A Rational Primer.

Here I should like to quote Maria again:

> "Nothing but the true desire to be useful could have influenced any man of talents to choose such inglorious labours; but he thought no labour, however humble, beneath him, if it promised improvement in education. To the construction of twenty pages of a Rational Primer he devoted more time than it would have cost him to write an octavo volume on another subject. It gave him more trouble, than those who are not used to the difficulties of early instruction can be aware that the subject demands or deserves." 1

In 1798, as a member of the Irish Parliament, Mr. Edgeworth turned the attention of the House to the education of the people, thus showing the scope of his benevolence as an educationist. As a consequence of this, a bill was brought in which led eventually to the appointment of a Board and Commissioners of Education. It is interesting to note the contents of a letter to Lord Selkirk written by Mr. Edgeworth about this time, for it shows the changing attitude

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1. Edgeworth, Memoirs of Richard Lovell Edgeworth, Vol. II, p. 339.

among the people towards education:

> ".....fathers use their best endeavours to give their children the elements of education; the children perceive that this education is not an evil inflicted by old age on childhood; but they are early sensible that knowing how to read and write prepares them for situations something above that of day-labourers or wretched cottagers." 1

Further on in the same letter, Mr. Edgeworth expresses his opinion that poor children make better students than those of the rich. This is only to be expected from the man who suggested, and encouraged his friend Mr. Thomas Day to write, The History of Sandford and Merton.

So far we have seen Mr. Edgeworth as the educationist pursuing his own individual way at home and abroad, steadily pushing forward his scheme for the intellectual improvement of his fellow-beings. Let us see now what he did for their material welfare as "the friend of the poor".

We get a very good idea of the squalor and misery of the Irish poor from various parts of the Memoirs. Perhaps it is best for us to know at this point the intentions with which Mr. Edgeworth assumed his duty as the landlord of Edgeworthstown in 1782,

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1. Edgeworth, Memoirs of Richard Lovell Edgeworth, Vol. II, p. 305 f.

when he went there to settle down permanently. He says, on the very first page of the second volume of his Memoirs, that he is determined:

> ".....to dedicate the remainder of my life to the improvement of my estate, and to the education of my children; and farther, with the sincere hope of contributing to the melioration of the inhabitants of the country from which I drew my subsistence."

I do not think we can appreciate the true worth of such words, if carried through faithfully, unless we know what great problems faced Mr. Edgeworth when he first arrived at Edgeworthstown. Miss Edgeworth gives a vivid account of their arrival.

> "Things and persons are so much improved in Ireland of latter days, that only those, who can remember how they were some thirty or forty years ago, can conceive the variety of domestic grievances, which, in those times, assailed the master of a family, immediately upon his arrival at his Irish home. Wherever he turned his eyes, in or out of his house, damp, dilapidation, waste! appeared. Painting, glazing, roofing, fencing, finishing - all were wanting. The back yard, and even the front lawn round the windows of the house, were filled with loungers, followers and petitioners; tenants, undertenants, drivers, subagent and agent, were to have audience; and they all had grievances and secret information, accusations reciprocating, and quarrels each under each interminable. Alternately as landlord and magistrate, the proprietor of an estate had to listen to perpetual complaints, petty wranglings, and equivocations, in which no human sagacity could discover truth, or award justice. Then came widows and orphans, with tales of distress, and cases of oppression, such as the ear and heart of unhardened humanity could not withstand.

> And when some of the supplicants were satisfied, fresh expectants appeared with claims of promises, and hopes, beyond what any patience, time, power, or fortune, could satisfy. Such and so great the difficulties appeared to me, by which my father was encompassed on our own arrival at home, that I could not conceive how he could get through them, nor could I imagine how these people had ever gone on during his absence. I was with him constantly, and I was amused and interested in seeing how he made his way through these complaints, petitions, and grievances, with decision and dispatch; he, all the time, in good humour with the people, and they delighted with him; though he often rated them roundly, when they stood before him perverse in litigation, helpless in procrastination, detected in cunning, or convicted of falsehood. They saw into his character, almost as soon as he understood theirs." 1

Moreover, he dealt with them in accordance with what seems to me to be another principle in his conduct towards his fellow-beings, viz., to lead them to the right or the good, not by words alone, but by actions as well. As Maria says:

> "My father began, where all improvements should begin, at home. He was sensible that, till his own home was comfortable, he could not pursue his principal objects; he could not set any example of neatness and order, or of propriety and proportion in his mode of living." 2

We meet a further elaboration of the scene of confusion which Maria has just described for us, in

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1. Edgeworth, Memoirs of Richard Lovell Edgeworth, Vol. II, p. 2 ff.
2. Ibid., p. 5.

her novel Castle Rackrent, which is supposed to be the "Memoirs of the Rackrent Family" as narrated by an illiterate old steward called Thady Quirk, whose love for "the family in which he was bred and born must be obvious to the reader".[1] In the passage to be quoted Thady is describing his master's agent:

> "Sir Kit Rackrent, my young master, left all to the agent; and though he had the spirit of a prince, and lived always to the honour of his country abroad, which I was proud to hear of, what were we the better for that at home? The agent was one of your middle men, who grind the face of the poor, and can never bear a man with a hat on his head: he ferreted the tenants out of their lives, not a week without a call for money, drafts upon drafts from sir Kit; but I lay it all to the fault of the agent; for, says I, what can sir Kir do with so much cash, and he a single man? but still it went. Rents must be all paid up to the day, and afore; no allowance for improving tenants, no consideration for those who had built upon their farms: no sooner was a lease out, but the land was advertised to the highest bidder, all the old tenants turned out, when they spent their substance in the hope and trust of a renewal from the landlord. All was now set at the highest penny to a parcel of poor wretches, who meant to run away, and did so, after taking two crops out of the ground. Then, fining down the year's rent came into fashion; anything for the ready penny; and with all these, and presents to the agent and the driver, there was no such thing as standing it.
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> [NOTE: Middle men:- There was a class of men termed middle men in Ireland, who took large farms on long leases from gentlemen of landed property, and set the land again in small portions to

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1. Edgeworth, Castle Rackrent, Preface, p. xii.

> the poor, as under-tenant, at exorbitant rents. The head landlord.....seldom saw his under-tenants; but if he could not get the middle men to pay him his rent punctually, he.....sent his steward or bailiff, or driver, to the land to seize the cattle, hay, corn, flax, oats, or potatoes, belonging to the under-tenants, and proceeded to sell these for his rent: it sometimes happened that these unfortunate tenants paid their rent twice over, once to the middle man, and once to the head landlord.[1]

Such was the state of Irish tenure, and we find other pictures of the abuses perpetrated by the agents of absentee landlords in another of Miss Edgeworth's novels, The Absentee.[2]

The question naturally arises, did Mr. Edgeworth live up to his high-sounding intentions in spite of such chaotic conditions? The answer is given in his daughter's words as she looks back.

> "The exertions he made from the time he settled at Edgeworth-Town in 1782, in building comfortable dwellings for some of his tenants, and in assisting others to build the same for themselves; - his never following the vile system of making forty shillings freeholders, merely for electioneering purposes - the reasonable rent and tenure at which he let his land - the unusual time he allowed his tenants to MAKE their rent - his freeing them from DUTY WORK - his avoiding as much as possible, in his leases, oppressive or restrictive clauses - his respecting the TENANT'S RIGHT, wherever tenants had improved - his encouraging them by the certainty of justice and kindness - his

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1. Edgeworth, Castle Rackrent, pp. 15-16.
2. Edgeworth, The Absentee, p. 202 ff.

> discouraging all expectation of partial favour or PROTECTION, if they transgressed the laws, or if they lived in indolence and inebriety; succeeded altogether beyond his most sanguine hopes, in meliorating the condition of the people. Especially within the last twenty years, his tenantry, and the whole face of his estate, strikingly improved in appearance, and essentially in reality. The poorest class of his tenants, who in former times lived in smoke and dirt, in too pitiable a condition for description, have now to most of their cabins chimneys and windows, comfortable thatch, and good earthen floors. The dunghills no longer stop up the windows, nor is 'the first step out of the cabin into the dirt'. .....And what is of more consequence, and of better promise for the future permanence of good habits, and for the progress of improvement, much of what has been done has been effected, not by the landlord, but by the tenants. .....No matter how small, my father always, from the first dawning of hope, hailed the appearance of these efforts with due encouragement and as instance; and this, more than any pecuniary donations, tended to increase the disposition to exertions." 1

This is a surprising achievement from an extreme disciple of Rousseau, for we see in it the transformation of a dreamer into a practical man of action, who saw evil around him and proceeded to cut away at its root. And yet we must bear in mind that all these improvements and innovations took place at a time when land-ownership was never more powerful from a political point of view, or more rewarding from an economic one. As Mr. Keith Feiling tells us in his

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1. Edgeworth, Memoirs of Richard Lovell Edgeworth, Vol. II, p. 368 ff.

History of England, at the beginning of the period, 1670-1852:

> "Fashion and profit both brought money to the soil, and it was the large owners who made possible the expansion of the food supply, which was to carry a much larger population through war and revolution. These improvers (Townshend, Bedford, Bakewell and Tull), indeed, created modern agriculture. .....As in France, a philosophy sprang up in praise of the land as the mother of virtue and prosperity, and in 1768 Arthur Young, a reformer of extraordinary energy, published the first of a series of notes on tours through England, in which for thirty years he preached enclosure and big farming against the 'Goths and Vandals' of open field. .....Whereas the enclosure movement under the Tudors had been carried out in the teeth of government and against many of the best minds of the age, the exact reverse obtained in the eighteenth century. It was part of that spirit of improvement which had begun to revolutionize farming, spurred on by Parliament and applauded by experts....." 1.

Mr. Edgeworth may have been influenced by the new spirit of enthusiasm which carried with it a strong utilitarian emphasis, when he turned to the improvement of his estate. Still, in executing his purpose - whatever its essential motive - he did a great deal of good among his dependents. In his own particular sphere of Edgeworthstown, and in his own individual way, Mr. Edgeworth did more for education and for the relief

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1. Feiling, History of England, Book VI, pp. 686 and 799.

and improvement of the poor than any one man could have hoped to do in a similar position and under the very same conditions.

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CHAPTER IV.

THOMAS DAY.

In a study of the life of Richard Lovell Edgeworth, one figure keeps emerging in his conversation, correspondence and activities, namely, that of Mr. Thomas Day. I must confess that on first acquaintance, Mr. Day did not seem at all prepossessing. Both Mr. Edgeworth and Mr. James Keir - close friends of his - admit him to be slovenly to a degree in appearance; awkwardly aloof in the company of strangers; and embarrassingly outspoken on occasion, staunch advocate of virtue and reason that he had constituted himself. He was also highly eccentric in some of his views as Mr. Edgeworth tells us in his Memoirs.

> "Mr. Day was suspicious of the female sex, and averse to risking his happiness for their charms or their society..... He delighted, even in the company of women, to descant on the evils brought upon mankind by love.....and, what was still more extraordinary, he expected that, with a person neither formed by nature, nor cultivated by art, to please, he should win some female wiser than the rest of her sex, who would feel for him the most romantic and everlasting attachment - a paragon, who should forget the follies and vanities of her sex for him....." 1

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1. Edgeworth, Memoirs of Richard Lovell Edgeworth, Vol. I, pp. 181-182.

True to expectation, Mr. Day suffered a few set-backs in searching for this "paragon" of a woman, including a failure to win the hand of Mr. Edgeworth's sister while he was on a visit to Ireland with his friend in the Spring of 1768. In Mr. Edgeworth's words, again,

> "Mr. Day suffered indeed at the time, but his heart and his pride soon recovered, and he determined to put in practice a scheme, which had long occupied his imagination. This was no common project, but a design more romantic than any which we find in novels. Mr. Day resolved to breed up two girls, as equally as possible, under his own eye; hoping that they might be companions to each other while they were children, and that, before they grew up to be women, he might be able to decide, which of them would be most agreeable to himself for a wife." 1

Surely a most extraordinary thing to do, even for a broken-hearted young man. Still, it should be interesting to note that in undertaking this experiment, Mr. Day was acting under the influence of Rousseau's notion that society is an unnatural state, in which all genuine worth of the human species is perverted, and therefore, in order to prevent children from being tainted by its vices, prejudices and artificial manners, they should be educated apart from the world.

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1. Edgeworth, Memoirs of Richard Lovell Edgeworth, Vol. I, p. 214.

Accordingly, Day took his two little wards to France where, by not teaching them a word of French and by making sure that they never came in contact with anyone except in his presence, he attained ideal circumstances for his experiment. The experiment failed, and Day is soundly criticized for having undertaken it at all by his biographer and friend, Keir, who says:

> "Nothing surely can be more absurd than the principle of this plan of education, or more impracticable in execution; for society is not only natural to man, but also necessary, if not for his existence, yet certainly for the attainment and perfection of those qualities which give him the preeminence over all other animals, and which are the principal subjects of comparative excellence among men. An education, therefore, which has not society in view must be defective, not only in that instruction which ought to explain our duties and relations, but also in the acquisition of the most important habits, particularly that of controlling our selfish impulses for the sake of general order and happiness." 1

But we must not be too hard on Mr. Day for this reason. After all, Mr. Edgeworth confesses that he himself - practical man though he was! - was under Rousseau's influence in his youth. If this was possible with Mr. Edgeworth, how much more with a character of such romantic temperament as Mr. Day. But enough of these transient foibles, for even while

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1. Keir, Account of the Life and Writings of Thomas Day, Esq., p. 25 ff.

we are laughing at his friends' recollections of them, our minds are being led to the deeper, and therefore, real Mr. Day. As Keir says:

> "Public regard is due to the character of Mr. Day, not only on account of his literary talents; but it will be given more willingly, when it is remembered that these talents were employed, not ostentatiously for his personal ambition, but strenuously in the cause of humanity, freedom, and virtue; and still more when it is known that his fortune also, which was ample, was so devoted to the service of his fellow creatures, that he seemed to have considered himself the steward of his possessions, in trust for the exercise of generosity and relief of misery, rather than as the inheritor for his own gratification." 1

Let us examine the grounds for such lofty praise. The question of slavery comes to mind right away, for Day, in conjunction with a friend, John Bicknell, has the honour of being the very first man to write on slavery in either prose or verse. This article is the very moving poem, The Dying Negro, written and first published in 1773. The Advertisement of the poem gives us a good summary of the theme, besides pointing out that it was based on actual fact. It says:

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1. Keir, Account of the Life and Writings of Thomas Day, Esq., p. 3.

"The following poem was occasioned by a fact which happened at the time of its first publication in 1773. A Negro, belonging to the Captain of a West-Indiaman, having agreed to marry a white woman, his fellow-servant, in order to effect his purpose, had left his master's house, and procured himself to be baptized; but being detected and taken, he was sent on board the Captain's vessel then lying in the river; where, finding no chance of escaping, and preferring death to another voyage to America, he took an opportunity of stabbing himself. As soon as his determination is fixed, he is supposed to write this Epistle to his intended wife."

I should like to quote two passages from the poem, both written by Day. First, that wherein the slave (then a chief) describes how he and his warriors were enticed aboard the English Captain's ship, drugged, and how they woke up in chains:

"O wretches! to your future evils blind!
O morn for ever present to my mind!
When bursting from the treach'rous bands of sleep,
Rouz'd by the murmurs of the dashing deep,
I woke to bondage and ignoble pains,
And all the horrors of a life in chains.
Ye Gods of Afric! in that dreadful hour
Where were your thunders and avenging pow'r!
Did not my pray'rs, my groans, my tears invoke
Your slumb'ring justice to direct the stroke?
No pow'r descended to assist the brave,
No lightnings flash'd, and I became a slave.
From lord to lord my wretched carcase sold,
In christian traffic, for their sordid gold:
Fate's blackest clouds were gather'd o'er my head;
And, bursting now, they mix me with the dead." 1

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1. Day, The Dying Negro, l.201 ff.

In the second passage the slave takes leave of his love. I quote it not only for its pathos, but because - in a manner worthy of a disciple of Rousseau - Day here invests his Negro with all the virtues and edifying traits he found wanting in his own countrymen:

"And I have lov'd thee with as pure a fire,
As man e'er felt, or woman can inspire:
No pangs like these my pallid tyrants know,
Not such their transports, and not such their woe.
Their softer frames a feebler soul conceal,
A soul unus'd to pity or to feel:
Damp'd by base lucre, and repell'd by fear,
Each nobler passion faintly blazes there.
Not such the mortals burning Afric breeds,
Mother of virtues and heroic deeds!
Descended from yon radiant orb, they claim
Sublimer courage, and a fiercer flame.
Nature has there, unchill'd by art, imprest
Her awful majesty on ev'ry breast.
Where'er she leads, impatient of controul,
The dauntless Negro rushes to the goal;
Firm in his love, resistless in his hate,
His arm is conquest, and his frown is fate." 1

Day dedicated this poem to his idol, Rousseau. In the Dedication, he expresses the hope that Rousseau will take up his pen again in aid of such a worthy cause.

Day also published "A Fragment of an Original Letter on the Slavery of the Negroes; written in the Year 1776". In the Advertisement of this letter,

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1. Day, The Dying Negro, l.247 ff.

Day tells us that his American correspondent had desired to know his sentiments upon slavery, and professed an intention of freeing his slaves if Day could convince him that it was his duty to do so. Day says to him:

> "I respect you, Sir, too much to doubt the sincerity of the declaration you make, when you profess to be guided by reason and morality upon this question; for this is the only arbitration which any man can have to consult upon a subject like this: where they are silent, the voice of the whole world ought to be disregarded; and where they approve, the dissent of all mankind can have no influence upon a mind like yours." 1

Then he enters into a most forceful description of the plight of the Africans from the time they were torn from their homes until they reach the plantations in America or the West Indies. "I shudder at the horrors which I describe, and blush to be a human creature!" 2 But the core of his argument is found in the following few lines.

> "If there be an object truly ridiculous in nature, it is an American patriot, signing resolutions of independency with the one hand, and with the other brandishing a whip over his affrighted slaves." 3

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1. Day, "A Fragment of an Original Letter.....", p. 12
2. Ibid., p. 31.
3. Ibid., p. 33.

As for the Americans' plea that they have no actual hand in the plundering of the African coasts, Day says contemptuously:

> "You do not go to Africa to buy or steal your Negroes; perhaps, because you are too lazy and luxurious: but you encourage an infamous, pitiless race of men to do it for you, and conscientiously receive the fruit of their crime. You do not, merciful men, reduce your fellow-creatures to servitude!" 1

What biting sarcasm! But the best is yet to come in Day's parting shot:

> "Yes, gentlemen, as you are no longer English, I hope you will please to be men; and, as such, admit the whole human species to a participation of your unalienable rights." 2

I only hope that the American gentleman wasn't expecting to be won over by a conciliatory tone. In any case, he could not deny the sincerity of the writer, nor the logical conclusiveness of his arguments.

Day wrote at the time of the American War of Independence, and we find references to it not only in the letter just quoted from, but also in the Dedication of his poem, The Dying Negro, where we are shown his

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1. Day, "A Fragment of an Original Letter.....", p. 36.
2. Ibid., p. 38.

actual feelings with regard to the American Independence. As James Keir says of him:

> "His attachment to his native country was not of that selfish and illiberal kind which excused or palliated injustice to others, under pretence of national interest." 1

Hence his support of the Americans' resistance to the imposition of taxes without their consent, the writing of the poem, "Desolation of America", and of the political pamphlet, "Reflections on the Present State of England, and on the Independence of America". In the latter, he clearly states his motives.

> "Few have shown themselves more completely English either in their principles or conduct, than myself. But I have never been able to cherish an exclusive partiality for any country at the expense of justice and humanity; and were I capable of doing it, the result of all my experience tends to convince me, that the real interest of no society was or will be promoted by systems which contradict the plainest principles of morality." 2

In the passage about to be quoted from the Dedication of his poem, it should be observed that while supporting the young State in her fight for liberty, he was not blind to her faults, nor to the Mother-country's superiority on a vital count, already touched

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1. Keir, Account of the Life and Writings of Thomas Day, Esq., p. 48.
2. Day, "Reflections on the Present State of England .....", p. 99.

upon in his "Fragment of an Original Letter on the Slavery of the Negroes". Here, as in the latter, he attacks the incongruity of America's demand for liberty and independence with her denial of all such rights to the slaves on her plantations; so he says,

> "Much as an impartial observer may find to blame in Britain, her colonies, I fear, are not much more acceptable to Providence. - Let the wild, inconsistent claims of America prevail, when they shall be unmixed with the clank of chains, and the groans of anguish. Let her aim a dagger at the breast of her milder parent, if she can advance a step without trampling on the dead carcasses of her slaves: - But let her remember, that it is in Britain alone, that laws are equally favourable to liberty and humanity; that it is in Britain the sacred rights of nature have received their most awful ratification. - Could I flatter myself that I might contribute to such a cause, or interest the generous minds of my countrymen to extend an ampler protection to the most innocent and miserable of their own species, I should congratulate myself that I had not lived in vain." 1.

Such aspiration challenges our respect and admiration.

James Keir says of Day towards the end of his Account:

> "...(He was) a gentleman of affluent fortune exercising frugality on himself, and bounty on all around him. If any poor wanted employment, Mr. Day provided it for them. If they were sick, he supplied them with such medicines as he could venture to administer, but he trusted more to the good effects of the food and cordials which his kitchen

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1. Day, "Reflections on the Present State of England .....", p. 17.

> or his money furnished. If they wanted advice in their affairs, he was their counsellor; in his political writings he was their protector; and in all cases their friend and benefactor." 1

Moreover,

> ".....he ever treated (them) with kindness and condescension, rather as less fortunate brothers of the same family, than as beings of a different and inferior order, as they seem to be considered by men who confound the accidental advantages of fortune with personal excellence." 2

The improvement of his estate in Surrey gave him the opportunity of employing a large number of labourers, especially during the short days of winter, when avaricious farmers discharged many of their men and the industrious poor were, in consequence, often distressed. This was in conformity with the principle he stressed in a letter to Mr. Edgeworth, written in 1789:

> "The result of all my speculations about humanity is, that the only way of benefiting mankind is to give them employment, and make them earn their money." 3

In other words, help them to be independent, instead of

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1. Keir, Account of the Life and Writings of Thomas Day, Esq., p. 134.
2. Ibid., p. 33.
3. Edgeworth, Memoirs of Richard Lovell Edgeworth, Vol. II, p. 92.

dependent.

Another fact we learn from James Keir is that Day at one time thought of taking up the study of medicine in order to be better able to help the poor, but was dissuaded from so doing by his friend, Dr. William Small of Birmingham, who pointed out to him the risks involved in such a profession owing to the inherent lack of "certainty and precision" in the science itself. The thought of possibly doing harm to his fellow-creatures turned Day to the study of law instead, for he believed that much of their misery could be removed by an improved legislation.[1] That he not only succeeded in his exertions, as is amply testified to by the substance and influence of his political writings, but that he never forgot the purpose behind such undertakings, we can judge for ourselves from two extracts from his "Dialogue Between a Justice of Peace and a Farmer". First we have that in which a farmer protests against the tax upon beggars' and labourers' "curs", whereupon the Justice replies, "And what business have these fellows to keep dogs at all?" The farmer, in a long speech, replies:

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1. Keir, Account of the Life and Writings of Thomas Day, Esq., p. 36 ff.

> "And what business have their betters? Are they not men.....that are compelled to suffer all the hardships that are incident to human nature? They rise several hours before the rich even think of putting on their clothes; they suffer the inclemency of all the seasons; they satisfy their hunger upon the coarsest food; and all to enable a few lazy, luxurious persons to riot upon their labours, and insult their useful poverty. But to deprive them of the few comforts which their situation admits, to force from them the honest, grateful animal that shares their hardships, amuses their children, and guards their cottage; this, this is a degree of diabolical tyranny.....". 1

In the second passage, the farmer pours forth further grievances the poor hold against their superiors:

> "If the poor are ignorant, why do you not instruct them? If they are profligate, why do you not reform them by your example? Instead of that, you content yourself with railing at us for the very vices with which you are infected to an hundred times greater degree..... If a poor man receives a few guineas for his vote, there is no human language too foul to stigmatize his conduct; but if a gentleman of the best education, and three thousand a year fortune, takes money of a corrupt Minister to ruin the nation, it is only, forsooth, that he will not serve his country for nothing." 2

In 1783 the first volume of a children's tale appeared in publication, followed by the second and third in 1787 and 1789, respectively. This was The History of Sandford and Merton. It consists of a succession of episodes in which the rich and objectionable Tommy

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1. Day, Tracts, "Dialogue Between a Justice of Peace and a Farmer", pp. 18-19.
2. Ibid., p. 50.

Merton is contrasted with the virtuous Harry Sandford, a farmer's son. It is written to illustrate Day's doctrine that virtue pays and that man may be made good by instruction and by appeal to his humanity and reason. We shall have a clearer idea of Day's purpose in writing this tale if we glance at a passage in Keir's Account:

> "In consequence of his opinion of the prevailing manners and with a view to guard the rising generation against the infection of the ostentatious luxury and effeminacy, which, amid many excellent qualities, characterise the present age, he wrote the history of Sandford and Merton. .....He did not consider the age as defective, but perhaps superior to any other in humane and generous inclinations, although these are too often rendered ineffectual by habitual expenses and imaginary necessities: and it did not appear to him therefore that the many ingenious books written lately for children, which principally inculcate humanity and generosity, were sufficient and adequate to all that was required in the forming of youth. The evil which ought principally to be guarded against, because it is the most predominant, is effeminacy of manners. In this age we fail more from want of strength and firmness, than of sensibility: more from the defect of those habits of fortitude, patience and self control, by which men are enabled to be what they approve, than from the prevalence of any vicious propensity." 1

Consequently, Sandford and Merton contains a good deal of censure and caricature of the prevalent idea of what makes a young gentleman. In a passage in which a Mrs. Compton is disapproving Mr. Merton's judgment

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1. Keir, Account of the Life and Writings of Thomas Day, Esq., pp. 80-81.

in allowing his son to be educated along with the boorish son of a farmer, instead of encouraging him to make connections proper to his station and beneficial to his future, for example, with the fashionable Lord Squander, a sensible young lady called Miss Simmon protests, whereupon Mrs. Compton retorts in a disdainful tone of voice:

> "Little grovelling minds, indeed, which are always envious of their superiors, might give a disagreeable turn to the generous openness of this young nobleman's temper. That as to gaming and running in debt, they were so essential to a man of fashion, that nobody who was not born in the city, and oppressed by city prejudices, would think of making the least objection to them. She then made a panegyric upon his lordship's person, his elegant taste and dress, his new phaeton, his entertaining conversation, his extraordinary performance upon the violin, and concluded that with such abilities and accomplishments, she did not doubt of one day seeing him at the head of the nation." 1

Exaggeration? I am not so sure. I really think that Mr. Day was painting from real life when he was writing this. In any case, that "effeminacy of manners" he so abhorred is fully described for us:

> "What disgusted Harry more than ever was, that his refined companions (i.e. Tommy Merton and his friends) seemed to consider themselves, and a few of their acquaintance, as the only beings of any consequence in the world. The most trifling

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1. Day, History of Sandford and Merton, p. 181.

> inconvenience, the being a little too hot, a little too cold, the walking a few hundred yards, the waiting a few minutes for their dinner, the having a trifling cold or a little head-ache, were misfortunes so feelingly lamented, that he would have imagined they were the most tender of the human species, had he not observed that they considered the sufferings of all below them with a profound indifference. If the misfortunes of the poor were mentioned, he heard of nothing but the insolence and ingratitude of that class of people, which seemed to be a sufficient excuse for the want of common humanity. Surely, said Harry, to himself, there cannot be so much difference between one human being and another; or if there is, I should think that part of them the most valuable, which cultivates the ground and provides necessaries for all the rest: not those who understand nothing but dress, walking with their toes turned out, staring modest people out of countenance, and jabbering a few words in a foreign language." 1

Surely the fault here lies not only in "effeminacy of manners" but in selfish insolence, and snobbish narrowness of mind, all of which, as Day firmly believed, can be counteracted and remedied by careful instruction. This history also gives us a chance to observe his agreement with the Edgeworths that instruction can be combined with play. Not being an enthusiast about the physical sciences, I cannot feel quite convinced of the children's pleasure at finding lessons on levers, wedges, wheels and axes and magnetism scattered through the tale. We must give Mr. Day credit, though, for having made the attempt.

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1. Day, History of Sandford and Merton, p. 197.

Keir likens Day to Howard, because , to his mind, they both possess "a large portion of sympathy" which he defines as:

> ".....that power of the imagination which transposes to our own breasts the misery or happiness of others, with the consequent desire to prevent the former, and to promote the latter..... (It is) the true source of all virtuous inclination." 1

Both were, moreover, possessed of "an uncommon degree of constitutional firmness or fortitude" without which the first quality is often rendered null.

To the interested seeker, Keir's Account reveals, further, a significant similarity between Day and Wordsworth.

> ".....Mr. Day, in his youth, was fond of seeing men and manners, but not being dazzled by those of the higher ranks, sometimes exclusively called 'the world', and perceiving that a knowledge of human nature was better to be learnt from the lower orders, where it appears less dignified by art; he used to take long journies through different parts of England and Wales on foot,.....mixing with people of all descriptions....." 2

Does not this recall the sentiments expressed in various parts of the Prelude, as well as in the Preface to the "Lyrical Ballads"? And this ?

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1. Keir, Account of the Life and Writings of Thomas Day, Esq., p. 12 ff.
2. Ibid., p. 32.

> "In the warmth of youth he had given scope to his virtuous indignation against the abuses and corruptions which prevail in all governments, and to his imagination in forming plans for their correction. But when he had an opportunity of seeing how few were animated with a sincere love of their country; how deficient in zeal and activity this principle was among most of those who possessed it; how often in parties the public cause was but a mask for some scheme of private ambition; how prevalent was the corruption of manners, the most dangerous foe to liberty; he was sensible what a feeble stand the defenders of public rights could make against invaders actuated by ambition, avarice, and other powerful selfish passion." 1

Does this not remind us of Wordsworth and the French Revolution and account for the following lines?

> "In vain the task to rouse my country's ire,
> And imp once more the stork's dejected wings,
> To solitude indignant I retire,
> And leave the world to parasites and kings;
> Not like the deer, whom wearied in the race
> Each leaf astonishes, each breeze appals;
> But like the lion, when he turns the chase
> Back on his hunters, and the valiant falls." 2

Though the word "deer" may bring to mind the name of yet another poet, it is clear from the above lines that Day's retirement to the solitude of his estate is very different from that of Cowper.

Day was essentially a moralist, and what does

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1. Keir, Account of the Life and Writings of Thomas Day, Esq., p. 69 ff.
2. Ibid., p. 60.

Keir say about a moralist?

> "The moralist who by some happy effort of genius is able to stem the tide of corrupted manners and turn it into a purer channel, carries with him his existence into future times..... It cannot be imagined then that the virtuous emotion excited by reading the many thousands of copies of Sandford and Merton.....can subside at once in the young breast where they were felt, but rather that they will continue and spread their influence more and more. And thus, by means of his works, as well as by the admirable pattern of the Author's life, the great object of his heart, Beneficence to Mankind, may be perpetuated beyond the short period of his existence here to succeeding generations." 1

Mr. Keir left out something in his highly informative panegyric upon his friend; he omitted to add that not only did Day live up to his lofty principle by his life and works, but also by his death. We find a full account of this in Mr. Edgeworth's Memoirs:

> "Mr. Day was killed by a fall from his horse. This excellent man was, at last, a victim of his own benevolence. Having observed that horses suffer much in the breaking, from the brutality of common horse-breakers, he had endeavoured by gentle means, to train a horse for himself; but it was not well broken. It took fright at some one winnowing corn near the road, plunged, and threw him. He had a concussion on the brain; never spoke after his fall; and in less than a quarter of an hour expired!" 2

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1. Keir, Account of the Life and Writings of Thomas Day, Esq., p. 105.
2. Edgeworth, Memoirs of Richard Lovell Edgeworth, Vol. II, p. 103.

He was, indeed a philanthropist and a humanitarian in the true sense of the words, and, as if anticipating a possible doubt in our minds whether his picture of Day may not have been portrayed by the too partial hand of friendship, Keir ends his Account with the following assurance:

> "Exaggeration would ill accord with a character of such simplicity and truth: his conscious shade would spurn the praise that was not his." 1

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1. Keir, Account of the Life and Writings of Thomas Day, Esq., p. 101.

CHAPTER V.

WILLIAM COWPER.

Cowper is too well-known to his readers as the poet of domestic joys and quiet scenes of nature; as God's prophetic thunderer on this earthly scene of evil; and as the author of "The Castaway", to warrant his presence among our group of humanitarian agitators without some explanation. What can such a tender, lovable, pathetic - if sometimes boring - character be doing in the midst of giants on the active human scene? As if anticipating our question, the poet says:

> "'Twere well, says one sage, erudite, profound,.....
> 'Twere well, could you permit the world to live
> As the world pleases. What's the world to you? -
> Much. I was born of woman, and drew milk,
> As sweet as charity, from human breasts.
> I think, articulate, I laugh and weep,
> And exercise all functions of a man.
> How then should I and any man that lives
> Be strangers to each other?.....
> What edge of subtlety canst thou suppose
> Keen enough, wise and skilful as thou art,
> To cut the link of brotherhood, by which
> One common Maker bound me to the kind?" 1

He realizes his own shortcomings and cannot deny the narrow limit of his world, but -

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1. Cowper, Poetical Works, "The Task," Book III, p. 168, l. 191 f.

".....Neither can I rest
A silent witness of the headlong rage
Or heedless folly by which thousands die,
Bone of my bone, and kindred souls to mine." 1

It was this fervent conviction which led him to sing with power in the cause of the weak and suffering. His sympathies were not wide, by virtue of the narrowness of his sphere, but into this he breathed a spirit of love and freedom.

After leaving St. Albans where he was treated for his first serious attack of insanity in 1765, Cowper retired to Huntingdon, and then Olney. Here he consoled himself with the relief he found for a time in the revived Evangelical faith.

Under the guidance and encouragement of his spiritual director and close friend, the Rev. John Newton, Cowper took part in the religious and charitable activities of his church, in the course of which he came into intimate knowledge of the sufferings of the poor of the parish. Cowper had not the means for their material relief, but what he had to offer in the way of service and thought, he contributed freely and selflessly. If the price which his nervous sensibility had to pay was heavy, he supplies but one more example of the rule that

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1. Cowper, Works, "The Task", Book III, p. 168, l.217 ff.

the poet learns in suffering what he tells in song.

This personal knowledge of the living conditions of the poor is reflected in Book IV of "The Task", where he draws with feeling words the following picture:

"Poor, yet industrious, modest, quiet, neat;
Such claim compassion on a night like this,
And have a friend in ev'ry feeling heart,
Warm'd, while it lasts, by labour, all day long
They brave the season, and yet find at eve,
Ill clad and fed but sparely time to cool.
The frugal housewife trembles when she lights
Her scanty stock of brush-wood, blazing clear,
But dying soon, like all terrestrial joys,
The few small embers left she nurses well;
And, while her infant race, with outspread hands
And crowded knees, sit cow'ring o'er the sparks,
Retires, content to quake, so they be warm'd.
The man feels least, as more inur'd than she
To winter, and the current in his veins
More briskly moved by his severer toil;
Yet he, too, finds his own distress in theirs.
The taper soon extinguish'd which I saw
Dangled along at the cold finger's end
Just when the day declin'd, and the brown loaf
Lodg'd on the shelf, half eaten, without sauce
Of sav'ry cheese, or butter, costlier still;
Sleep seems their only refuge:.....
They live, and live without extorted alms
From grudging hands; but other boast have none
To soothe their honest pride, that scorns to beg,
Nor comfort else, but in their mutual love.
I praise you much, ye meek and patient pair,
For ye are worthy; choosing rather far
A dry but independent crust, hard earn'd
And eaten with a sigh, than to endure
The rugged frowns and insolent rebuffs
Of knaves in office, partial in the work
Of distribution; lib'ral of their aid
To clam'rous importunity in rags,
But oft-times deaf to suppliants, who would blush
To wear a tatter'd garb however coarse,
Whom famine cannot reconcile to filth.
These ask with painful shyness, and refus'd,
Because deserving, silently retire!" 1

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1. Cowper, Works, "The Task", Book IV, p. 190, l. 347 ff.

Concerning the reality of the irresponsible conduct of the "knaves in office", George Nicholls, author of A History of the English Poor Law, gives us a good picture of the actual status of the poor in relation to their overseers towards the last quarter of the eighteenth century. He traces the various Acts passed to restrict the power of the latter, and ends with the remark:

> "Such (need for restrictions).....continued for the most part to be the view taken by the legislature down to the amendment of the Poor Law in 1834, the tendency of each successive Act, connected with the relief of the poor, being to place more and more power in the hands of the local magistracy; and this was done on.....the.....grounds.....that the overseers were harsh and incompetent, and not sufficiently attentive to the wants of the poor." 1

To suggest that it was an easy matter for Cowper to write about his poor neighbours in his poems and then leave it to chance to bring them to the notice of some charitably inclined and financially capable persons, would be most unfair. I should like to call attention to the content of some of his letters which provides us with ample proof that he was not only genuinely moved by the sight of poverty, but was determined to do all he could to alleviate it.

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1. Nicholls, A History of the English Poor Law, p. 89.

In a letter dated 23rd June, 1780, and addressed to Newton, he says:

> "We have sent a petition to Lord Dartmouth, by this post, praying him to interfere in Parliament, in behalf of the poor lacemakers." 1

During the first half of the century the lace trade had been good, and the town of Olney, which was the centre of it, had been in a prosperous condition. But as may be seen from Cowper's letter of July 8, 1780, to his friend, Joseph Hill, there had subsequently been a serious decline. Cowper, after begging Hill to try to enlist the Chancellor's sympathy on behalf of the lacemakers, says:

> "I am an eye witness to their poverty, and do know that hundreds in this town are upon the point of starving, and that the most unremitting industry is but barely sufficient to keep them from it." 2

Such are not the words or actions of an escapist who saw the world only from a distance, and whose intercourse with it was only such as might pass through "loopholes of retreat". 3

The poor of Olney were miserably poor, and it made Cowper wretched to think of the sufferings in front

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1. Hayley, Cowper, Vol. I, p. 197.
2. Ibid., p. 201.
3. Cowper, Works, "The Task", Book IV, p. 184, l. 88.

of them during the approaching winter. The lacemakers could earn only just enough to keep body and soul together even in summer-time, while in winter, when there was the additional difficulty of being compelled to procure fuel, their hardship can scarcely be imagined.

Writing to Unwin on November 4, 1782, Cowper says:

> "We do what we can. But that CAN is little. You have rich friends, are eloquent on all occasions, and know how to be pathetic on a proper one. The winter will be severely felt at Olney by many, whose sobriety, industry, and honesty recommend them to charitable notice: and we think we could tell such persons as Mrs. Bouverie or Mr. Smith, half a dozen tales of distress that would find their way into hearts as feeling as theirs." 1

The Mr. Smith alluded to was Mr. Robert Smith, afterwards Lord Carrington, a rich banker. The application was successful, and in his next letter dated November 18, 1782, Cowper was able to write:

> "On the part of the poor, and on our part, be pleased to make acknowledgements, such as the occasion calls for, to our beneficent friend, Mr. Smith." 2

Cowper told Unwin (January 22, 1784), that his heart burned to immortalize the donor. "How I love and

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1. Hayley, Cowper, Vol. II, p. 65.
2. Ibid., Vol. II, pp. 65-66.

honour that man!" he says.[1] Hence the tribute in Book IV of "The Task":

"I mean the man who, when the distant poor
Need help, denies them nothing but his name." 2

In the winter of 1783-84 Mr. Smith again befriended the poor of Olney: and in a letter to Newton dated February, 1784, Cowper says,

"Like the subterraneous flue that warms my myrtle, he does good and is unseen. His injunctions of secrecy are still as rigorous as ever, and must therefore be observed with the same attention." 3

In the poem "Charity", Cowper distinguishes between true and false charity, applauds the former and derides the latter.

"Some seek, when queasy conscience has its qualms,
To lull the painful malady with alms;
But charity, not feign'd, intends alone
Another's good - theirs centres in their own:
And, too short liv'd to reach the realms of peace
Must cease for ever when the poor shall cease.....
A conflagration or a wintry flood,
Has left some hundreds without home or food,
Extravagance and av'rice shall subscribe
While fame and self-complacence are the bribe.
The brief proclaim'd it visits ev'ry pew,
But first the squire's - a compliment but due:
With slow deliberation he unties
His glitt'ring purse - the envy of all eyes!
And, while the clerk just puzzles out the psalm,
Slides guinea behind guinea in his palm;

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1. Hayley, Cowper, Vol. II, p. 160.
2. Cowper, Works, "The Task", Book IV, p.191, l.427 ff.
3. Hayley, Cowper, Vol. II, p. 173.

Till, finding (what he might have found before)
A smaller piece amidst the precious store,
Pinch'd close between his finger and his thumb,
He half exhibits, and then drops the sum.
Gold, to be sure! - throughout the town 'tis told
How the good squire gives never less than gold,
From motives such as his, though not the best,
Springs in due time supply for the distress'd;
Not less effectual than what love bestows -
Except that office clips it as it goes." 1

The sentiment expressed is the passage just quoted was shared by Nicholls who says in the Introduction to his History:

"It must not be forgotten that the end of charity, both as enjoined by religion and demanded by humanity, is to benefit the recipient, not to exalt or glorify the giver; and the consequences of whatever may be done ought therefore never to be lost sight of, for if the effects be evil, either to the recipient or to society, the art of giving becomes a cause of evil - it is not charity in the true sense of the term, conducing to the good of its object and the benefit of the community." 2

Apart from serving as the conductor or dispenser of the bounty which he helped to procure for the poor of Olney, Cowper shows by his comments on "our new taxmaker", Pitt, his close observation of whatever affected them. Thus he says to Unwin in his letter of July 3, 1783:

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1. Cowper, Works, "Charity", p. 85, l.447 ff.
2. Nicholls, A History of the English Poor Law, Introduction, pp. 5-6.

"He provokes me still more by reasoning as he does on the justification of the tax upon candles. Some families, he says, will suffer little by it:- Why? Because they are so poor, that they cannot afford themselves more than ten pounds in the year. Excellent! They can use but few, therefore they will pay but little, and consequently will be but little burthened, an argument which for its cruelty and effrontery seems worthy of a hero; but he does not avail himself of the whole force of it, nor with all his wisdom had sagacity enough to see that it contains, when pushed to its utmost extent, a free discharge and acquittal of the poor from the payment of any tax at all; a commodity, being once made too expensive for their pockets, will cost them nothing, for they will not buy it. .....I wish he would visit the miserable huts of our lacemakers at Olney, and see them working in the winter months by the light of a farthing candle, from four in the afternoon till midnight. I wish he had laid his tax upon the ten thousand lamps that illuminate the Pantheon, upon the flambeaux that wait upon ten thousand chariots and sedans in an evening, and upon the wax candles that give light to ten thousand card-tables. I wish, in short, that he would consider the pocket of the poor as sacred.....to tax a people already so necessitous, is but to discourage the little industry that is left among us, by driving the laborious to despair." [1]

We have another reference to the same subject in a letter to Newton dated July 5, 1784.[2] Both these letters reveal a keen and intelligent interest in the process of law in the Houses of Parliament, an attitude I have not been able to detect in any of the correspondence or works covering the period he spent as an articled clerk in the office of Mr. Chapman, a solicitor,

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1. Wright, Correspondence of William Cowper, Vol. II, pp. 220-1
2. Ibid., pp. 224-5.

in Ely Place, Holborn (1749-51); nor those describing his long residences at the Middle and then the Inner Temple (1752-63). Those were the years which, as he himself tells us, were "constantly employed from morning to night in giggling and making giggle, instead of studying the law";[1] before he was completely in the clutch of his mental disorder, and before he found his faith.

Thanks to the exertions of Clarkson and Wilberforce, the country was about this time sorely exercised on the subject of the slave trade. Slavery was considered an economic necessity and people were unwilling to admit that even so, no material considerations could justify the injustice and cruelty of such a system. It must be remembered, however, that the inhumanities of the slave system lay beyond the range of the ordinary unimaginative Englishman's personal experience. He did not see the slave ships on the "Middle Passage" nor hear the cracking of the whips which called the slaves to work on the plantations, neither could he imagine the torturous punishments they were subjected to. All this contributed to the first bitter failure which the Abolitionists, headed by Wilberforce and sup-

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1. Wright, Correspondence of William Cowper, Vol. I, p. 2.

ported by Fox and Pitt, suffered in Parliament, where they were fighting to amend the law, which could recognise no illegality in the practice of slavery. Regarding the determination of the Abolitionists and their supporters to work for its reversal by mobilising public opinion against it, and the means employed, enough has been said in the chapter on Wilberforce and Clarkson. It was in support of this propaganda that Cowper's cousin, Lady Hesketh, suggested to him that he should write some songs concerning it, "as the surest way of reaching the public ear". Having, however, at that particular time (February, 1788), so much work on hand in the translation of Homer, Cowper, though he had the heartiest sympathy for the slaves, doubted whether he ought to take up a fresh subject. He says to her, therefore,

> "It occurred to me likewise, that I have already borne my testimony in favour of my black brethren (in the poem, "Charity"), and I was one of the earliest, if not the first of those who have in the present day expressed their detestation of the diabolical traffic in question." [1]

Nevertheless, we find him again "turning the matter in (his) mind in as many ways as he could",[2] the result

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1. Hayley, Cowper, Vol. III, pp. 111-112.
2. Ibid., p. 122.

being that he wrote four songs or ballads: "The Negro's Complaint", which was set to music and was rapidly sold, in the hands of the Abolitionists; "The Morning Dream"; "Sweet Meat has Sour Sauce"; and "Pity for Poor Africans". He also wrote a witty Epigram on the subject, short but sharp:

"To purify their wine some people bleed
A lamb into the barrel, and succeed;
No nostrum, planters say, is half so good
To make fine sugar, as a negro's blood.
Now lambs and negroes both are harmless things
And thence perhaps this wond'rous virtue springs,
'Tis in the blood of innocence alone -
Good cause why planters never try their own."

But to feel the depth of his abhorrence and the violence of his protest against such a shameless and inhuman transaction, we have to go back to his poem called "Charity", written in 1781 and published in the following year. His voice is loud with wrath and pain:

"But oh! what wish can prosper or what pray'r,
For merchants rich in cargoes of despair,
Who drive a loathsome traffic, gage, and span,
And buy, the muscles, and the bones of man?
The tender ties of father, husband, friend,
All bonds of nature, in that moment end;
And each endures, while yet he draws his breath,
A stroke as fatal as the scythe of death.
The sable warrior, frantic with regret
Of her he loves, and never can forget,
Loses in tears the far receding shore,
But not the thought that they must meet no more,
Deprived of her and freedom at a blow,

What has he left that he can yet forego?
Yes, to deep sadness sullenly resign'd
He feels his body's bondage in his mind;
Puts off his gen'rous nature, and, to suit
His manners with his fate, puts on the brute.
Oh, most degrading of all ills, that wait
On man, a mourner in his best estate!
All other sorrows virtue may endure,
And find submission more than half a cure,.....
But slav'ry! - virtue dreads it as her grave:
Patience itself is meanness in a slave." 1

And, why? Because -

"Nature imprints upon whate'er we see
That has a heart and life in it - Be free!" 2

Our poet then points his accusing finger at the wealthy, smug, enterprising but soul-less members of the society of his day and here we hear the voice of the fervent Evangelical:

"Canst thou, and honour'd with a Christian name,
Buy what is woman-born, and feel no shame?
Trade in the blood of innocence, and plead
Experience as a warrant for the deed?.....
Has God then given its sweetness to the cane -
Unless His laws be trampled on - in vain?.....
But grant the plea - and let it stand for just,
That man make man his prey because he must,
Still there is room for pity to abate,
And soothe, the sorrows of so sad a state.
A Briton knows - or, if he knows it not,
The Scripture plac'd within his reach, he ought -
That souls have no discriminating hue,
Alike important in their Maker's view:
That none are free from blemish since the fall,
And love divine has paid one price for all.

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1. Cowper, Works, "Charity", p. 79, l. 137.
2. Ibid., p. 80, l. 169.

The wretch that works and weeps without relief,
Has one that notices his silent grief.
He, from whose hand alone all pow'r proceeds,
Ranks its abuse among the foulest deeds,
Considers all injustice with a frown;
But marks the man that treads his fellow down.
Begone! - the whip and bell in that hard hand
Are hateful ensigns of usurp'd command,
Not Mexico could purchase kings a claim
To scourge him, weariness his only blame.
Remember, heav'n has an avenging rod -
To smite the poor is treason against God!" 1

Our poet then goes on to plead with his countrymen by appealing to their traditional love of freedom, and their consequent duty to safeguard its claim at home and overseas. Perhaps, through the propaganda of the Abolitionists he was made aware of Lord Mansfield's famous judgment; the following passage certainly points to the probability:

"We have no slaves at home. - Then why abroad?
And they themselves, once ferried o'er the wave
That parts us, are emancipated and loos'd.
Slaves cannot breathe in England; if their lungs
Receive our air, that moment they are free;
They touch our country, and their shackles fall.
That's noble and bespeaks a nation proud
And jealous of the blessing. Spread it then,
And let it circulate through ev'ry vein
Of all your empire; that where Britain's pow'r
Is felt, mankind may feel her mercy too." 2

Sometimes he falls into despair; then, he says, as in Book II of "The Task":

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1. Cowper, Works, "Charity", p. 80, l. 180 ff.
2. Ibid, "The Task", Book II, p. 147, l. 37 ff.

"There is no flesh in man's obdurate heart,
It does not feel for man; the nat'ral bond
Of brotherhood is sever'd as the flax
That falls asunder at the touch of fire.
He finds his fellow guilty of a skin
Not colour'd like his own; and, having pow'r
T'enforce the wrong, for such a worthy cause
Dooms and devotes him as his lawful prey." 1

But even then there is always consolation to be found in the knowledge that "grace makes the slave a freeman" [2] and thus:

"He is the freeman whom the truth makes free,
And all are slaves beside....." 3

By "truth", Cowper meant religious truth. We shall see that, for him, this is the only key to all problems. He also wrote a noble sonnet to Wilberforce whom he addressed as "Friend of the poor, the wrong'd, the fetter-gall'd," and whom he urged to even greater effort for "the better hour is near".

Cowper's letters to his friends during the first half of the year 1788 abound with references to the slave trade. Some were addressed to the Rev. John Newton who, before his ordination as an Evangelical minister,[4] had, amongst other experiences, been in the

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1. Cowper, Works, "The Task", Book II, p. 146, l. 8 ff.
2. Ibid., Book V, p. 215, l.688.
3. Ibid., p.215, l. 733 ff.
4. Bull, John Newton, pp. 20-40.

service of a slave dealer and served as the master of slave ships. The question naturally arises how far he influenced Cowper to choose a topic he could never write upon "without a degree of abhorrence that affect(ed his) spirits, and (sank) them below the pitch requisite for success in verse". [1] I have not been able to find any direct evidence of such an influence, nor yet of their having discussed the topic together before the year 1788, by which time "Charity" was already written, except the following extract from Gilbert Thomas's William Cowper and the Eighteenth Century. The author is describing the poet's life at Olney under the direct influence of Newton and of their association, he says:

> "Each was in large measure the temperamental complement of the other. Each had lost his mother in childhood and had known strange and bitter experiences. Newton would lend an intensely sympathetic ear to Cowper's records of misfortunes; Cowper, to whose imagination the sea always strongly appealed, would in turn be as much fascinated by Newton's reminiscences....." [2]

And that is all. By 1788, the Abolitionists were already in action, and they as much as John Newton may be held accountable for Cowper's choice.

The prisoners of his time also found a voice in him. His delineation of a prisoner in the Bastille,

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1. Wright, Correspondence of William Cowper, Vol. III, p. 276.
2. Bull, John Newton, pp. 20-40.

"th'abode of broken hearts," where

> ".....dwell the most forlorn of human kind;
> Immur'd though unaccus'd, condemn'd untried,
> Cruelly spar'd and hopeless of escape!" 1

is a good picture of most of the prisoners of his day. As has already been mentioned in the chapter on John Howard and Mrs. Fry, Parliament was perpetually enlarging, throughout the eighteenth century, the long list of offences punishable by death. Persons suspected of such offences were thrown into gaols, farmed out to gaolers who were paid no salaries and who therefore lived on what they could force out of the prisoners in their charge, whether the latter were tried or untried, guilty or innocent. Hence the prisons were a national disgrace. In Cowper's description we find none of the physical squalor described in John Howard's State of Prisons, but the mental and spiritual anguish is there. For example:

> "To count the hour-bell and expect no change;
> And ever, as the sullen sound is heard,
> Still to reflect, that, though a joyless note
> To him whose moments all have one dull pace,
> Ten thousand rovers in the world at large
> Account it music.....
> To fly for refuge from distracting thought
> To such amusements as ingenious woe
> Contrives, hard-shifting, and without her tools -

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1. Cowper, Works, "The Task", Book V, p. 208, l.397 ff.

To read engraven on the mouldy walls,
In stagg'ring types, his predecessor's tale,
A sad memorial, and subjoin his own -
To turn purveyor to an overgorg'd
And bloated spider, till the pamper'd pest
Is made familiar, watches his approach,
Comes at his call, and serves him for a friend -
To wear out time in numb'ring to and fro
The studs that thick emboss his iron door;
Then downward and then upward, then aslant
And then alternate; with a sickly hope
By dint of change to give his tasteless task
Some relish; till the sum, exactly found
In all directions, he begins again -
Oh comfortless existence! hemm'd around
With woes, which who that suffers would not kneel
And beg for exile, or the pangs of death?
That man should thus encroach on fellow man,
Abridge him of his just and native rights,
Eradicate him, tear him from his hold
Upon th'endearments of domestic life
And social, nip his fruitfulness and use
And doom him for perhaps an heedless word
To barrenness, and solitude, and tears,
Moves indignation..... 1

After all -

"'Tis liberty alone that gives the flow'r
Of fleeting life its lustre and perfume;
And we are weeds without it. All constraint,
Except what wisdom lays on evil men,
Is evil, hurts thy faculties, impedes
Their progress on the road of science; blinds
The eyesight of discovery; and begets
In those that suffer it, a sordid mind
Bestial, a meagre intellect, unfit
To be the tenant of man's noble form." 2

In calling the attention of his contemporaries

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1. Cowper, Works, "The Task", Book V, p. 208, l. 404 ff.
2. Ibid., p. 209, l. 446 ff.

to the evil of their penal system, Cowper did not forget to pay tribute to the father of prison reforms, John Howard. This we find in the poem "Charity":

"Patron of else the most despised of men,
Accept the tribute of a stranger's pen;.....
Blest with all wealth can give thee, to resign
Joys doubly sweet to feelings quick as thine,
To quit the bliss thy rural scenes bestow
To seek a nobler amidst scenes of woe,
To traverse seas, range kingdoms, and bring home
Not the proud monuments of Greece and Rome,
But knowledge such as only dungeons teach,
And only sympathy like thine could reach;
That grief, sequester'd from the public stage,
Might smooth her feathers, and enjoy her cage;
Speaks a divine ambition, and a zeal
The boldest patriot might be proud to feel....." 1

This is high praise indeed, warm as it is sincere.

Cowper shows concern over the education of young people in his letters to his friend, Unwin, on the education of the latter's son. In these he expresses preference for the domestic scheme because in his time, as he says in "The Progress of Error",

"Accomplishments have taken virtue's place,
And wisdom falls before exterior grace;
We slight the precious kernel of the stone,
And toil to polish its rough coat alone.
A just deportment, manners grac'd with ease,
Elegant phrase, and figure form'd to please,
Are qualities that seem to comprehend
Whatever parents, guardians, schools intend.

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1. Cowper, Works, "Charity", p. 82, l.290 ff.

Hence an unfurnish'd and a listless mind,
Though busy, trifling; empty, though refin'd;
Hence all that interferes, and dares to clash
With indolence and luxury, is trash;....." 1

This sounds like Thomas Day all over again. Cowper protests hotly against the public schools of his day where such policies prevailed. It makes one wonder how much his own sad experience at Dr. Pitman's school in 1738 contributed to this adverse view. Gilbert Thomas tells us:

> "While the two universities were semi-decaying, partly through the exclusion of dissenters, partly through the reservation of many chief posts to the clergy, and partly through internal friction, the schools were in equally parlous condition. The public schools suffered from indiscipline, bullying, and a lack of.....organization..... The Elizabethan and Stuart grammar schools had fallen into decline, though new ones, less uniformly fine in spirit, were springing up. The middle or lower classes, when their members received any tuition at all, had to take the best (or worst) that regional private enterprise could offer. The Society for the Promotion of Christian Knowledge, which had been founded by a few private gentlemen in 1696, was fostering the growth of charity schools, in addition to the main work of circulating cheap Bibles and tracts; while the dissenters and Quakers were beginning to provide their own establishments. Broadly speaking, however, education in the eighteenth century was, like most other things, a matter of chance. The boy Wordsworth was fortunate in attending the school for farmers' sons at Hawkshead. The six-year old Cowper was tragically unlucky in being entrusted to Dr. Pitman's care." 2.

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1. Cowper, Works, "The Progress of Error", p. 26, l.417 ff.
2. Thomas, William Cowper and the Eighteenth Century, pp. 54-55.

Hence the following entry in Cowper's memoirs on his residence there:

> "I had hardships of various kinds to conflict with, which I felt more sensibly in proportion to the tenderness with which I had been treated at home. But my chief affliction consisted in my being singled out from all the other boys by a lad of about fifteen years of age as a proper object upon whom he might let loose the cruelty of his temper. I choose to conceal a particular recital of the many acts of barbarity with which he made it his business continually to persecute me. It will be sufficient to say that his savage treatment of me impressed such a dread of his figure upon my mind, that I well remember being afraid to lift my eyes upon him higher than to his knees, and that I knew him better by his shoe-buckles than by any other part of his dress." 1

Bearing this in mind, we do not find it strange that when his friend Unwin applied to him for advice on the education of his son, Cowper wrote back his strong preference for the domestic type of education.

It was based on principles amazingly similar to those promulgated by Mr. Edgeworth and his daughter, Maria, in Practical Education.[2] Moreover, he wrote a poem on the subject called "Tirocinium: or A Review of Schools" (1784). Writing to Newton on its publication, Cowper says:

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1. Goldwyn Smith, Cowper, p. 8.
2. Cf. Edgeworth, Memoirs....., Vol. II, pp. 125 and 185; Practical Education, p. 39; Wright, Correspondence of William Cowper, Vol. I, pp. 234-235.

> "I do not know that schools in the gross, and especially public schools, have ever been so pointedly condemned before. But they are become a nuisance, a pest, an abomination, and it is fit that the eyes and noses of mankind should, if possible, be opened to perceive it." 1

The purpose of "Tirocinium", therefore, was to censure the want of discipline, and the scandalous lack of care and supervision in the schools of Cowper's time. The poem recommends private tuition as a mode of education preferable on all accounts; calls upon fathers to become tutors of their own sons, where that is practicable; otherwise to take home a domestic tutor or place them under the care of some rural parson whose attention is limited to a few. He asks the parents:

> "Would you your son should be a sot or dunce,
> Lascivious, headstrong; or all these at once;
> That, in good time, the stripling's finish'd taste
> For loose expense and fashionable waste
> Should prove your ruin and his own at last;
> Train him in public with a mob of boys,
> Childish in mischief only and in noise,
> Else of a mannish growth, and five in ten
> In infidelity and lewdness men.
> There shall he learn, ere sixteen winters old,
> That authors are most useful pawn'd or sold;
> That pedantry is all that schools impart,
> But taverns teach the knowledge of the heart;
> There waiter Dick, with Bacchanalian lays,
> Shall win his heart, and have his drunken praise,

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1. Wright, Correspondence of William Cowper, pp. 204-5.

His counsellor and bosom-friend shall prove,
And some street-pacing harlot his first love.
Schools, unless discipline were doubly strong,
Detain their adolescent charge too long;
The management of tiros of eighteen
Is difficult, their punishment obscene.
The stout tall captain, whose superior size
The minor heroes view with envious eyes,
Becomes their pattern, upon whom they fix
Their whole attention, and ape all his tricks.
His pride, that scorns t'obey or to submit,
With them is courage; his effront'ry wit.
His wild excursions, window-breaking fits,
Robb'ry of gardens, quarrels in the streets,
His hair-breadth 'scapes, and all his daring schemes
Transport them, and are made their favourite themes.
In little bosoms, such achievements strike
A kindred spark; they burn to do the like." 1

Here, Cowper gives us what seems to be a pathetically true picture of a typical public-school boy of his time. Further on in the poem, he depicts for the eyes of his contemporaries the true character of those to whom they entrust the care and education of their sons and heirs:

"Much zeal in virtue's cause all teachers boast,
Though motives of mere lucre sway the most;
Therefore in towns and cities they abound,
For there the game they seek is easiest found;
Though there, in spite of all that care can do,
Traps to catch youth are most abundant too.
If shrewd, and of a well-constructed brain,
Keen in pursuit, and vig'rous to retain,
Your son come forth a prodigy of skill;
As, wheresoever taught, so form'd he will;
The pedagogue, with self-complacent air,
Claims more than half the praise as his due share.

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1. Cowper, Works, "Tirocinium", p. 246, l. 201 ff.

But, if, with all his genius, he betray
Not more intelligence than loose and gay,
Such vicious habits as disgrace his name,
Threaten his health, his fortune, and his fame;
Though want of due restraint alone have bred
The symptoms that you see with so much dread;
Unenvy'd there, he may sustain alone
The whole reproach - the fault was all his own!" 1

But would the parents think for their son's future and remedy the scandalous state of affairs? No, they would much rather bow to customs and precedents, and support the folly that was leading to their ruin. What about colleges, our poet asks:

"Send him to College. If he there be tam'd,
Or in one article of vice reclaim'd,
Where no regard of ord'nances is shown
Or look'd for now, the fault must be his own.
Some sneaking virtue lurks in him, no doubt,
Where neither strumpets' charms nor drinking bout,
Nor gambling practices, can find it out.
Such youths of spirit, and that spirit too,
Ye nurs'ries of our boys, we owe to you!
Though from ourselves the mischief more proceeds,
For public schools 'tis public folly feeds." 2

But is criticism - true and appropriate though it may be - all our poet had to offer? No, for that would make him a penetrating satirist and a witty mocker of the deplorable scene, but not the humane lover of his fellows we know him to be. Cowper had a remedy to offer to parents, namely, the domestic scheme of education and

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1. Cowper, Works, "Tirocinium", p. 253, l. 517 ff.
2. Ibid., p. 247, l. 240.

we have evidence from one of his letters to his friend, Joseph Hill, of his readiness to prove his point by personally assuming charge over the education of two boys under his own roof.[1]

Cowper most appeals to me as a friend and protector of helpless animals. He seems unable to apprehend how anyone can be otherwise than kind and humane to them, or take joy in hounding them to their death. He feels that,

> "The heart is hard in nature and unfit
> For human fellowship, as being void
> Of sympathy, and therefore dead alike
> To love and friendship both, that is not pleas'd
> With sights of animals enjoying life,
> Nor feels their happiness augment his own." 2

In his Life of William Cowper, Thomas Wright tells us that when Cowper was seized by madness, and it was decided to place him under Dr. Nathaniel Cotton's care at the latter's Collegium Insanorum at St. Albans, on December 7, 1763, Cowper is said to have been perfectly indifferent to the fate of his belongings with, characteristically, one exception and that was his cat. Thus, even in his direst affliction, and when everything else was disregarded, Cowper, a life-long lover of

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1. Wright, Correspondence of William Cowper, Vol. I, p. 187.
2. Cowper, Works, "The Task", Book VI, p. 226, l. 321 ff.

animals, had a thought for his dumb companion.[1]

His love for his pets, Puss, Bess, and Tiney (the hares) and Beau (the dog) - to name a few - shines out at us with a heart-warming glow when we read his poems on them. There is nothing affectedly sentimental about his feeling, rather it is spontaneous and sincere. Thus he says to Puss:

"Innocent partner of my peaceful home
Whom ten long years' experience of my care
Hast made at last familiar; she has lost
Much of her vigilant instinctive dread,
Not needful here, beneath a roof like mine.
Yes - thou mayst eat thy bread, and lick the hand
That feeds thee; thou mayst frolic on the floor
At evening, and at night retire secure
To thy straw couch, and slumber unalarm'd;
For I have gain'd thy confidence, have pledg'd
All that is human in me to protect
Thine unsuspecting gratitude and love.
If I survive thee I will dig thy grave;
And, when I place thee in it sighing, say,
I knew at least one hare that had a friend." 2

This touching little address is preceded in Book III of "The Task" by his well-known passage against hunting:

".....Detested sport
That owes its pleasures to another's pain;
That feeds upon the sobs and dying shrieks
Of harmless nature, dumb, but yet endu'd
With eloquence, that agonies inspire,

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1. Wright, Life of William Cowper, p. 51.
2. Cowper, Works, "The Task", Book, III, p. 171, l.337 ff.

Of silent tears and heart-distending sighs!
Vain tears, alas, and sighs, that never find
A corresponding tone in jovial souls!" 1

In referring to sportsmen in a prose description of his hares, printed in "The Gentleman's Magazine" (June, 1784), Cowper said:

"He little knows what amiable creatures he persecutes, of what gratitude they are capable, how cheerful they are in their spirits, what enjoyment they have of life, and that impressed as they seem with a peculiar dread of man, it is only because man gives them peculiar cause for it."

In "The Task", Cowper tries to find a reason for all the cruelty dumb creatures have suffered at the hand of their master, Man. He comes to the sad conclusion that though God intended Man as the king of all animals, bound only by "the law of universal love", "sin marr'd all". Thus we have

".....the persecution and the pain
That man inflicts on all inferior kinds,
Regardless of their plaints. To make him sport,
To gratify the frenzy of his wrath,
Or his base gluttony, are causes good
And just, in his account, why bird and beast
Should suffer torture, and the streams be dyed
With blood of their inhabitants impal'd.
Earth groans beneath the burden of a war
Wag'd with defenceless innocence, while he
Not satisfied to prey on all around,

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1. Cowper, Works, "The Task," Book III, p. 171, l.326 ff.

Adds tenfold bitterness to death by pangs
Needless, and first torments ere he devours." 1

We can almost hear Cowper's bitterness as he says:

"So little mercy shows who needs so much!
Does law, so jealous in the cause of man,
Denounce no doom on the delinquent? - None." 2

Such, Cowper says, is our gratitude for:

"Attachment never to be wean'd or chang'd
By any change of fortune; proof alike
Against unkindness, absence and neglect;
Fidelity, that neither bribe nor threat
Can move or warp; and gratitude for small
And trivial favours, lasting as the life,
And glist'ning even in the dying eye." 3

But our poet urged all animal lovers not to despair, for

".....Many a crime, deem'd innocent on earth
Is registered in heav'n; and there, no doubt,
Have each their record, with a curse annex'd.
Man may dismiss compassion from his heart,
But God never will....." 4

So we can imagine the strong surge of emotion and the depth of his feelings when Cowper says:

"And I am recompens'd and deem the toils

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1. Cowper, Works, "The Task", Book VI, p. 228, l.384 ff.
2. Ibid., p. 229, l. 431 ff.
3. Ibid., p. 233, l. 625 ff.
4. Ibid., p. 229, l. 439 ff.

Of poetry not lost, if verse of mine
May stand between an animal and woe,
And teach one tyrant pity for his drudge." 1

Here we have the essence of his feeling for animals, especially his pets. It is protective, tender, and therefore strong. Perhaps a consciousness of his own weakness and dependence on others - to be seen in his relationships with his friends, particularly Mrs. Unwin - enabled Cowper to carry out so well his task of protection. His attitude towards animals was very different from that of Wordsworth, as we shall see.

B.Kirkman Gray said in the Preface of his History of English Philanthropy:

> "The greater part of philanthropy may be said to consist in contributions of money, service, or thought, such as the recipient has no strict claim to demand, and the doer is not compelled to render. Strict claim, for there is a larger consideration, whether the fact of a common humanity does not itself constitute a claim of right. In some dim subconscious recognition of such a vaguely outlined right as this, all philanthropic action has its roots."

Summing up the life of Cowper, his letters and his works, we may say that he was deeply conscious of the claim of his fellow-creatures in this world - on his thoughts, his feelings and his service - and his many endeavours to lessen their suffering and improve their lot "speak loudly for him".

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1. Cowper, Works, "The Task", Book VI, p.235, l. 725 ff.

CHAPTER VI.

GEORGE CRABBE.

After the intensely religious tone pervading all Cowper's most important poems, it is with some surprise that we turn to Crabbe and find on his pages - those of a cleric - hardly a trace of the faith he held. Compared with that of Cowper, Crabbe's attitude towards life could not have been more secular. Perhaps it is unfair to Cowper to compare him with one who lived so close to life, especially to life in its harshest form. Until Crabbe obtained the patronage of Edmund Burke in 1781, his life was one unbroken chain of privation and disappointment. The fact that he experienced this during the most impressionable years of his life accounts for the bitterness we find in his earlier poems. Hence, also, the passionate note of protest and indignation with which the poor in his poems are described, and the unwavering and even unflinching accuracy characterizing, and making eminent, those descriptions.

Crabbe had one enduring ambition, and that was to tell the truth about country life. For this task

he was peculiarly well equipped by virtue of the circumstances into which he was born and in which he would no doubt have remained longer than he did - with what effect on his future, it is hard to conjecture - had not Burke changed his fortune. Crabbe's father was a collector of salt-duties, whose life deteriorated materially and morally as he advanced in years, with disastrous effect on his temper. His mother was an invalid. Inclined since early years to literary and botanical interests, he was nevertheless obliged to study medicine in order to be able to aid his family. Meanwhile, he worked at "odd jobs". At one period,

> ".....His father employed him in the warehouse on the quay of Slaughden, in labours which he abhorred, though he in time became tolerably expert in them; such as piling up butter and cheese." 1

The phrase "labours which he abhorred" can, I think, be used to sum up his occupations at this stage of his life.

Crabbe finished his apprenticeship without acquiring much knowledge of the science of healing, and upon his return home to Aldeburgh, he was appointed parish doctor. In this capacity, he came into even closer contact with life in its most painful and sordid forms.

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1. The Life of the Rev. George Crabbe, by his Son, (1837); p. 19.

Judging from the pictures of it in his poems, Aldeburgh was, in Crabbe's time, a poor and wretched town, so we can imagine his experience as a doctor whose patients more often than not belonged to its shabbiest quarters. "The Village" (1783), "The Parish Register" (1807), and "The Borough" (1810) all describe life and character as the poet had seen them in Aldeburgh.

Cowper aroused my sympathy with his pictures of the poor. Crabbe shocked me into actual realization of the extremity of their needs. I remember being moved by Cowper's description of a poor family shivering hungrily before a cold and empty grate,[1] but what is this compared with Crabbe's description of the dwelling of some wretched poor in the poem "Parish Register" ?

> "Here in cabal, a disputatious crew
> Each evening meet: the sot, the cheat, the shrew;
> Riots are nightly heard - the curse, the cries
> Of beaten wife, perverse in her replies;
> While shrieking children hold each threat'ning hand,
> And sometimes life, and sometimes food, demand:
> Boys, in their first stol'n rags, to swear begin,
> And girls who heed not dress, are skill'd in gin:
> Snarers and smugglers here their gains divide;
> Ensnaring females here their victims hide; .....
> Between the road-way and the walls, offence
> Invades all eyes and strikes on every sense:
> There lie, obscene, at every open door,
> Heaps from the hearth and sweepings from the floor;
> And day by day the mingled masses grow,
> As sinks are disembogued and kennels flow.

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1. Cowper, Works, "The Task", Book IV, l. 374 ff.

There hungry dogs from hungry children steal;
There pigs and chickens quarrel for a meal;
There dropsied infants wail without redress,
And all is want and woe and wretchedness: .....
See! crowded beds in those contiguous rooms;
Beds but ill parted by a paltry screen
Of paper'd lath or curtain dropp'd between;
Daughters and sons to yon compartments creep,
And parents here beside their children sleep.
Ye who have power, these thoughtless people part,
Nor let the ear be first to taint the heart!
Come! search within, nor sight nor smell regard;
The true physician walks the foulest ward.
See! on the floor what frouzy patches rest!
What nauseous fragments on yon fractur'd chest!
What downy dust beneath yon window-seat!
And round these posts that serve this bed for feet;
This bed, where all those tatter'd garments lie,
Worn by each sex, and now perforce thrown by." 1

Sordid? Repulsive? Yes, but who can deny the authenticity of the description, coming as it does from the pen of one who lived close to such squalor? Crabbe's knowledge of his unhappy neighbours did not stop short at the superficial appearance of their dwellings and their outward life. His intimate contact with them early revealed to him the cause of most of their sufferings and he says:

"Whence all these woes? - From want of virtuous will,
Of honest shame, of time-improving skill;
From want of care t'employ the vacant hour,
And want of ev'ry kind but want of power." 2

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1. Poems of George Crabbe, Vol. I, "The Parish Register", Part I, p. 162, l.170 f.
2. Ibid., p. 164, l.226 f.

But, thinks Crabbe, this does not absolve the rich and able from their duty to aid their less fortunate fellows, and in his descriptions of the latter and his sarcastic references to the former, we sense all the bitterness in his soul, intensified by his own share of suffering, especially in the years of frustration and near-despair, when he sought the patronage of the wealthy and powerful Lords North, Shelburne and Thurlow,[1] and found only indifference. Thus in "The Village" we hear his answer to those who, either out of stupid ignorance or a desire to ease a guilty conscience, would insist that the life of the poor has its compensation, and is really not as unbearable as he would have them believe:

> "Yet grant them (the poor) health, 'tis not for us to tell,
> Though the head droops not, that the heart is well,
> Or will you praise that homely, healthy fare,
> Plenteous and plain, that happy peasants share?
> Oh! trifle not with wants you cannot feel,
> Nor mock the misery of a stinted meal -
> Homely, not wholesome; plain, not plenteous; such
> As you who praise would never deign to touch.
> Ye gentle souls who dream of rural ease,
> Whom the smooth stream and smoother sonnet please;
> Go! if the peaceful cot your praises share,
> Go, look within, and ask if peace be there:
> If peace be his - that drooping weary sire,
> Or theirs, that offspring round their feeble fire;
> Or hers, that matron pale, whose trembling hand
> Turns on the wretched hearth th'expiring brand!" [2]

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1. Ward and Waller, Cambridge History of English Literature, Vol. XI, p. 142.
2. Crabbe, Poems, Vol. I, "The Village", Book I, p. 124, l. 164 f.

Further on, and with the rich still in mind, Crabbe denounces the "cold charity" which is responsible for the maintenance of the parish poor-house:

"Theirs (i.e. people like the 'hoary swain') is yon
house that holds the parish poor,
Whose walls of mud scarce bear the broken door;
There, where the putrid vapours, flagging, play,
And the dull wheel hums doleful through the day -
There children dwell who know no parents' care;
Parents, who know no children's love, dwell there!
Heart-broken matrons on their joyless bed,
Forsaken wives, and mothers never wed;
Dejected widows with unheeded tears,
And crippled age with more than childhood fears;
The lame, the blind, and far the happiest they!
The moping idiot and the madman gay.
Here too the sick their final doom receive,
Here brought, amid the scene of grief, to grieve
Where the loud groans from some sad chamber flow,
Mix'd with the clamours of the crowd below;
Here sorrowing, they each kindred sorrow scan,
And the cold charities of man to man;
Whose laws indeed for ruin'd age provide,
And strong compulsion plucks the scrap from pride;
But still that scrap is bought with many a sigh,
And pride embitters what it can't deny." 1

Crabbe says then that this is not true charity, and in a brief passage which contains one of his few direct references to Christianity, he tells us what true charity should consist in:

"'Tis not enough that we with sorrow sigh,
That we the wants of pleading man supply;

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1. Crabbe, Poems, Vol. I, "The Village", Book I, p. 125, l. 228 ff.

That we in sympathy with sufferers feel,
Nor hear a grief without a wish to heal,
Not these suffice - to sickness, pain, and woe,
The christian spirit loves with aid to go;
Will not be sought, waits not for want to plead,
But asks the duty - nay, prevents the need,
Her utmost aid to every ill applies,
And plans relief for coming miseries." 1

What an appropriate and exact description of all the characters we have considered so far, for the essence of true charity exists in both believers and unbelievers as long as they have the love of their fellow-creatures in them. But Crabbe knew, as Cowper did, that such pure, selfless and constructive benevolence is all too rare, so charitable institutions, even those initiated by Christian love, have to depend on varied sources for their completion. So he says:

"How rose the building? - Piety first laid
A strong foundation, but she wanted aid;
To Wealth unwieldy was her prayer address'd,
Who largely gave, and she the donor blessed.
Unwieldy Wealth then to his couch withdrew,
And took the sweetest sleep he ever knew.
Then busy Vanity sustained her part
'And much' she said, 'it moved her tender heart;
'To her all kinds of man's distress were known,
'And all her heart adopted as its own.'
Then Science came - his talents he display'd
And Charity with joy the home survey'd;
Skill, Wealth, and Vanity, obtain the fame,
And Piety, the joy that makes no claim." 2

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1. Crabbe, Poems, Vol. I, "The Borough", Letter XVII, p. 440, l. 3 ff.
2. Ibid., p. 441, l. 54 ff.

How vividly the last two lines call up pictures of Howard, Mrs. Fry and Wilberforce.

For his pictures of "unwieldy Wealth" and "busy Vanity" had Crabbe, we wonder, living prototypes in mind? We need only turn to one versed in the philanthropy of the poet's own time to be assured that he had.

> "The philanthropic reports contain many passages that provoke a smile and some that are of a repellent character. This is probably to be accounted for by the necessity under which this kind of literary composition labours of proceeding on a false presupposition. In theory, society consists of a large number of charitable people; in fact, the number of those who can properly be so described is a small one. The few who are really in earnest in their desire to alleviate distress even at the cost of a considerable expenditure of time and money, are surrounded by a multitude of persons who are willing to assist but only provided they can do so at no great inconvenience to themselves. This lower power of sympathy passes gradually through the stage of languid interest to complete indifference. The theory is further vitiated by the many subscribers who are moved only by business consideration, as e.g., a fear of being thought less liberal than a trade rival. But the number who can be prevailed on to become subscribers varies with the force of appeal that is addressed to them. The amount of a subscription is determined on the same principle. One of the most potent devices of the charity report writer is therefore to create in the minds of those who are not charitable, or charitable only in the slightest degree, a flattering illusion of their own virtue. The following is a good specimen in this style: - 'Let it not be surmised that the committee are of opinion that those who gave on this occasion did it with a view that their good works might here be recorded; they are amply convinced that humanity, not meaner motives prompted to this benevolence. Justice, nevertheless, is due to all, and to those

who are entitled to rewards by doing well, more particularly.' Then followed the subscription list. ("Proceedings of the Committee.....Relieving Poor Germans", 1764) The value of a high sounding rhetoric disguised as modesty was (also) soon discovered.

Appeals to the vanity or crude literary taste of some, were supplemented by appeals to the common sense of others. Nothing is more common than to suggest that whatever may be said of other schemes, the particular charity that is being recommended is undoubtedly of the highest value and not liable to abuse. At the end of the century soup kitchens were advocated on both these grounds. Again, there is an appearance of dealing frankly with the plain man on the score of expense. "It will do much more good with much less expense than any other charity. ....." 1

Letter XIII of "The Borough" on "The Alms-House and Trustees", contains a clever contrast between a frugal merchant who silently goes around doing good and his opposite, Sir Denys Brand. Crabbe is at his amusing and sarcastic best here:

"Sir Denys had magnanimity:
His were no vulgar charities; none saw
Him like the merchant to the hut withdraw;
He left to meaner minds the simple deed,
By which the houseless rest, the hungry feed;
His was a public bounty vast and grand;
'Twas not in him to work with viewless hand." 2

Although there are many pathetic and even

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1. B.K.Gray, History of English Philanthropy, pp. 226-7.
2. Crabbe, Poems, Vol. I, "The Borough", Letter XIII, p. 411, l.141 ff.

painful characters that we come across in Crabbe's poems, a few are outstandingly so. Among these, I include "the hoary swain" of "The Village", Ellen Orford of "The Borough", and - painful to an almost unbearable degree - the female vagrant in "The Hall of Justice" and the condemned Highwayman in "The Borough". In any occupation involving an inordinate exertion of some faculty or sense - the feeling of pain in this case - a point is reached when an explanation of this demand is required, and Crabbe gives it in the Preface of "The Borough". We must remember, however, that by the time of the publication of this poem (1810), Crabbe had already arrived at a comfortable position in life and hence there had been ample time for his bitterness to dissolve itself in the midst of rising poetic fame and the mellowing effect of the society of cultivated friends from the first rank of the literary, social and political world of his day. Thus, in the Preface, where he is preparing the reader for the reception of the painful scenes in Letter XXIII on "Prisons" he says - the italics, it need hardly be mentioned, are not his own -

> "It has always been held as a salutary exercise of the mind, to contemplate the evils and miseries of our nature. I am not, therefore, without hope, that even this gloomy subject of Imprisonment, and more especially the Dream of the condemned

> Highwayman, will excite in some minds that mingled pity and abhorrence, which, while it is not unpleasant to the feelings, is useful in its operation: it ties and binds us to all mankind by sensations common to us all, and in some degree connects us, without degradation, even to the most miserable and guilty of our fellow-men." 1

Crabbe's aim, therefore, is to bring the various classes of society closer together, to make them feel the common bond of humanity. He realised, perhaps, that great social problems can never be thoroughly solved by any particular institution or organization without the support of every single individual of that society. It is difficult enough to preach patience and resignation with convincing truth without being handicapped by the insolence and selfish indifference of thoughtless individuals. The adage that in helping others one is actually helping one's self can be interpreted in the spiritual as well as the material sense, and is true in both. Sad to say, there are some who cannot see this point, and even more who cannot practise it. Crabbe hoped and believed that if only men were made to feel the social bond that ties them to their fellows, then there would be no need for such admonitions as the following, which offers yet another of his illustrations of desirable conduct in those to whom the needy

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1. Crabbe, Poems, Vol. I, "The Borough, pp. 279-80

appeal:

"Not with disdainful pride, whose bounties make
The needy curse the benefits they take;
Not with the idle vanity that knows
Only a selfish joy when it bestows;
Nor with o'erbearing wealth, that, in disdain,
Hurls the superfluous bliss at groaning pain;
But these are men who yield such bless'd relief
That with the grievance they destroy the grief;
Their timely aid the needy sufferers find,
Their generous manner soothes the suffering mind;
Theirs is a gracious bounty, form'd to raise
Him whom it aids; their charity is praise;
A common bounty may relieve distress,
But whom the vulgar succour, they oppress;
This, though a favour, is an honour too;
Though mercy's duty, yet 'tis merit's due:
When our relief from such resources rise
All painful sense of obligation dies;
And grateful feelings in the bosom wake,
For 'tis their offerings, not their alms, we take." 1

I cannot but feel that had Crabbe known Thomas Day, he would have approved him highly, for he fits so perfectly into Crabbe's ideal. We see Day again when we read of Crabbe's "frugal Merchant" in Letter XIII of "The Borough" on "The Alms-House and the Trustees," as he wanders about in his thread-bare coat, enduring ridicule for his austere manner of life without revealing the "serious sums (which he) in healing misery spent." 2

Unlike Wordsworth, Crabbe could not find consolation in Nature. In fact, in "The Village", he

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1. Crabbe, Poems, Vol. I, "The Borough", Letter III, p. 311, l.296 ff.
2. Ibid., Letter XIII, ("The Alms-House and the Trustees"), p. 409, l. 28.

shows that though there are places where Nature is fairer and kinder than in the scene of his poem, the beauty of Nature is of no avail to make the life of the peasant easier.[1] This is true enough from a practical point of view, and yet I find it disappointing that Crabbe, in spite of his deep faith, appears to have had no share in the surge of optimistic joy which the least of Nature's (or, for the religious, God's) creatures aroused in Wordsworth. If he had, he did not allow it to interfere with his deliberate attempt to depict the negative aspect in respect of human welfare. I had the feeling, while reading Crabbe, that here was a scene of human life, minutely and painstakingly portrayed, and yet, underlying all the pathos and indignation, there was an undeniable sense of narrowness. Crabbe was very much down-to-earth in his study of life and its problems; if anything, he studied them too closely. Still, such exertions afforded him that knowledge which, for lack of ability in the physical and mental sense, Cowper never fully attained, and which, perhaps, led Wordsworth to build his idealistic approach to the problem of human ills.

We are given many pictures of Crabbe in his

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1. Crabbe, Poems, Vol. I, "The Village" Part I, p. 123, ll. 131-139.

son's biography which greatly increase our regard for him. I have chosen two for quotation. The first incident took place not long after he obtained Burke's patronage, whereupon notices from eminent persons started to pour in upon him, among them the gift of a hundred pounds from the Lord Chancellor Thurlow:

> "The first use he made of this good fortune was to seek out and relieve some objects of real indigence - poor scholars like himself, whom he had known when sharing their wretchedness in the city: and.....whenever he visited London in later years, he made it his business to enquire after similar objects of charity, supposed to be of respectable personal character, and to do by them as, in his own hour of distress, he would have been done by." 1

Then, of his life as a clergyman, we read:

> "At Strathern, and at all his country residences, my father continued to practise his original profession (i.e. surgery) among such poor people as chose to solicit his aid. The contents of his medicine chest, and, among the rest, his cordials, were ever at their service; he grudged no personal fatigue to attend the sick bed of the peasant, in the double capacity of physician and priest." 2

These passages show that not only did he practise what he preached, but more, he did not forget his friends after he himself had been raised from their midst.

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1. Crabbe, Life of the Rev. George Crabbe, (1837); p. 102.
2. Ibid., p. 130.

Crabbe also deals with the question of education in his works. His impressions of schools and school-boys were quite as adverse as those of Cowper and Wordsworth. Consider, for instance, the following conversation between the brothers in "Tales of the Hall".

"We name the world a school, for day by day
We sometime learn, till we are call'd away;
The school we name a world, - for vice and pain,
Fraud and contention, there begin to reign;
And much, in fact, this lesser world can show
Of grief and crime that in the greater grow.
'You saw,' said George, 'in that still-hated school
'How the meek suffer, how the haughty rule:
'There soft, ingenuous, gentle minds endure
'Ills that ease, time, and friendship fail to cure;
'There the best hearts, and those who shrink from sin,
'Find some seducing imp to draw them in,
'Who takes infernal pleasure to impart
'The strongest poison to the purest heart.
'Call to your mind this scene - Yon boy behold:
'How hot the vengeance of a heart so cold!
'See how he beats, whom he had just reviled
'And made rebellious - that imploring child;
'How fierce his eyes, how merciless his blows,
'And how his anger on his insult grows;
'You saw this Hector and his patient slave,
'Th'insulting speech, the cruel blows he gave,
'Mix'd with mankind, his interest in his sight,
'We find this Nimrod civil and polite;
'There was no triumph in his manner seen,
'He was so humble, you might think him mean.
'Those angry passions slept till he attain'd
'His purposed wealth, and waked when that was gain'd..." 1

Crabbe thus shows that for those who are educated in such an atmosphere,

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1. Crabbe, Poems, Vol. II, "Tales of the Hall", Book III, p. 320, l. 1 ff.

"Years from the mind no native stain remove
But lay the varnish of the world above." 1

Crabbe seems to have been a precocious child; hence the greater attention his parents paid to his education than to that of his brothers. In the words of J.H.Evans:

> They (the parents) resolved to send George to Bungay where he spent four years with little to recall except that he nearly lost his life in this way. He and several other schoolfellows were punished for playing at soldiers by being put into a large dog-kennel, known by the terrible name of "The Black Hole". George first entered, and the place being crammed full with offenders, the atmosphere soon became pestilentially close. The poor boy in vain shrieked that he was about to be suffocated. At last, in despair, he bit the lad next to him violently in the hand. 'Crabbe is dying! Crabbe is dying!' roared the sufferer, and the sentinel at length opened the door and allowed the boys to rush out into the air. 'A minute more and I must have died' he (Crabbe) told his son!" 2

His experience at a school at Stowmarket which he attended from 1765-68, after leaving Bungay, left him with equally unpleasant memories, for there the bigger boys treated him badly.[3] Hence the following portrait in his Letter on Schools in "The Borough":

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1. Crabbe, Poems, Vol. II, "Tales of the Hall", Book III, p. 323, l. 110 ff.
2. Evans, The Poems of George Crabbe, pp. 7-8.
3. Ibid., p. 8.

".....The tyrant-boy, whose sway
All hearts acknowledge, him the crowd obey:
At his command they break through every rule;
Whoever governs, he controls the school;.....
Hark! at his word the trembling younglings flee;
Where he is walking none must walk but he;
See! from the winter fire the weak retreat;
His the warm corner, his the favourite seat.....
At his command his poor dependents fly,
And humbly bribe him as a proud ally;
Flatter'd by all, the notice he bestows
Is gross abuse and bantering and blows;....." 1

Crabbe's experience of schools, therefore, can be said to have been as unfortunate as Cowper's, although constitutionally he was better able to undergo it. Unlike Cowper and Wordsworth, however, Crabbe found time to write on the drudgeries of a teacher's life. As in his treatment of nature, he seems to refuse to allow that there may be a happier side to the picture. So just as he dwells upon the "frowning coast", "withering brake", "blighted rye" and "sterile soil" in describing a tract of country near the coast of "The Village", here he turns his mind to all the grievous annoyances and frustrations that attend a poor scholar's life. How much his own aversion to his study and practice of medicine, and the various kinds of menial work he had to take before his years of fame, contributed to the realism

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1. Crabbe, Poems, Vol. I, "The Borough", Letter XXIV, p. 520, l.287 ff.

of the portrait, is an interesting point to consider. It is a sympathetic study: like Crabbe himself, Leonard had to depend very much on his own efforts to advance the studies closest to his heart.

"But Leonard! - yes, for Leonard's fate I grieve,
Who loathes the station which he dares not leave;
He cannot dig, he will not beg his bread;
All his dependence rests upon his head;
And, deeply skill'd in sciences and arts,
On vulgar lads he wastes superior parts.
Alas! what grief that feeling mind sustains,
In guiding hands and stirring torpid brains;
He whose proud mind from pole to pole will move,
And view the wonders of the worlds above;
Who thinks and reasons strongly - hard his fate,
Confined forever to the pen and slate. .....
Amid his labours, he has sometimes tried
To turn a little from his care aside;
Pope, Milton, Dryden, with delight has seized,
His soul engaged and of his trouble eased,
When, with a heavy eye and ill-done sum,
No part conceived, a stupid boy will come;
Then Leonard first subdues the rising frown,
And bids the blockhead lay his blunders down;
O'er which disgusted he will turn his eye,
To his sad duty his sound mind apply,
And, vex'd in spirit, throw his pleasures by." 1

Again unlike Cowper and Wordsworth, Crabbe, we find, pays hardly any attention to animals in his poems; not that he was indifferent to their lot, as the following passage will show, but even here they came to his notice only because they happened to represent one of the many vices of the people with whom he was most concerned.

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1. Crabbe, Poems, Vol. I, "The Borough", Letter XXIV, p. 516, l. 109 ff.

"Here his poor bird the inhuman cocker brings,
Arms his hard heel and clips his golden wings,
With spicy food th'impatient spirit feeds,
And shouts and curses as the battle bleeds.
Struck through the brain, deprived of both his eyes,
The vanquished bird must combat till he dies;
Must faintly peck at his victorious foe,
And reel and stagger at each feeble blow.
When fall'n, the savage grasps his dabbled plumes,
His blood-stain'd arms, for other deaths assumes;
And damns the craven-fowl, that lost his stake
And only bled and perish'd for his sake." 1

Sometimes Crabbe attacks a vice openly, as here, sometimes through delineation of character, but he holds throughout to a most humane and enlightened principle: in his own words,

"Man's vice and crime I combat as I can,
But to his God and conscience leave the man;.....
But is there man whom I would injure? - no!
I am to him a fellow, not a foe -
A fellow-sinner, who must rather dread
The bolt, than hurl it at another's head.
No! let the guiltless, if there such be found,
Launch forth the spear, and deal the deadly wound;
How can I so the cause of virtue aid,
Who am myself attainted and afraid?
Yet, as I can, I point the powers of rhyme,
And, sparing criminals, attack the crime." 2

A long passage on the same theme can also be found in a letter he wrote to a friend from Trowbridge in 1816, a Mrs. Mary Leadbeater. It shows a care to make his

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1. Crabbe, Poems, Vol. I, "The Parish Register", Part I, p. 164, l. 257 ff.
2. Ibid,, "The Borough", Letter XXIV, p. 524, l. 450 ff.

delineations true to life without betraying the originals from which they were drawn, for "charity bade me be cautious".[1]

Before passing on from Crabbe, I should yet like to refer to one little poem, unique in his collection of works by virtue of its subject. This is the poem "Woman!", written in connection with the travels of Mungo Park, a surgeon in the mercantile marine of the late eighteenth century, who explored the course of the Niger and became famous through his Travels in the Interior Districts of Africa: performed under the Direction and Patronage of the African Association, in the years 1795, 1796, and 1797. This was published in 1799, only two years after the Abolitionists started their campaign against the slave trade. One of the stumbling-blocks which the owners of slaves put in their way can best be summed up in the attitude of a Jamaican official, Edward Long, whose well-known history of the island was published in 1774. Coupland records it:

> ".....(Long) desired that slaves should be humanely treated, but he argued at some length that they should be classed with orang-outangs as 'a different species of the same genus'. To keep them thus like

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1. Crabbe, Life of George Crabbe, (1837), p. 232.

'living tools' or domestic animals, with no hope of ever climbing the partition which shut them off from civilized human life - such was the basic idea which, broadly speaking, inspired the owners' attitude." 1

Mungo Park's book, published at this time, was of vital aid to the Abolitionists' stand, for though apparently against abolition in that he believed that in the

".....unenlightened state of their minds.....the effect (upon the natives) would neither be so extensive or beneficial, as many wise and worthy persons may fondly expect....." 2

Park gives a very good account of many of the native tribes in matters of local administration and education,[3] while anecdotes of their simplicity, their guile and their superstition also abound. What struck me most was the simple way in which he describes the compassion and humaneness he experienced among the women-folk he met when he fell into distress. There was, for instance, an incident at Joag, the frontier town of Kajaaga, where he was ill-treated and robbed of half of his effects by order of Batcheri, the king:

"Towards evening, as I was sitting upon the

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1. Coupland, The British Anti-Slavery Movement, p. 28.
2. Park, Travels in the Interior of Africa", p. 298.
3. Ibid., pp. 19-20 and p. 60.

Bentang (a public place of meeting), chewing straws, an old female slave, passing by with a basket upon her head, asked me if I had got my dinner. As I thought she only laughed at me, I gave her no answer; but my boy, who was sitting close by, answered for me; and told her, that the King's people had robbed me of all my money. On hearing this, the good old woman, with a look of unaffected benevolence, immediately took the basket from her head, and shewing me that it contained ground-nuts, asked me if I could eat them; being answered in the affirmative, she presented me with a few handfuls, and walked away, before I had time to thank her for this seasonable supply. I reflected with pleasure on the conduct of this poor untutored slave, who, without examining into my character or circumstances, listened implicitly to the dictates of her own heart. Experience had taught her that hunger was painful, and her own distresses made her commiserate those of others." 1

Another time in the town of Jumbo, Mungo Park says:

"When we arrived at the blacksmith's place of residence, we dismounted and fired our muskets. The meetings between him and his relations were very tender; for these rude children of nature, free from restraint, display their emotions in the strongest and most expressive manner. Amidst these transports, the blacksmith's aged mother was led forth, leaning upon a staff. Every one made way for her; and she stretched out her hand to bid her son welcome. Being totally blind, she stroked his hands, arms, and face, with great care, and seemed highly delighted that her latter days were to be blessed by his return, and that her ears once more heard the music of his voice. From this interview I was fully convinced, that whatever difference there is between the Negro and European in the conformation of the nose and the colour of the skin, there is

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1. Park, Travels in the Interior of Africa, pp. 69-70.

> none in the genuine sympathies and characteristic feelings of our common nature." 1

Lastly, Park was not unaware of their great propensity to steal but he hastens to point out, this is common to the lower classes of people in any part of Europe.[2]

> "On the other hand, as some counterbalance to this depravity in their nature, allowing it to be such, it is impossible for me to forget the disinterested charity, and tender solicitude, with which these poor heathens sympathized with me in my sufferings; relieved my distresses; and contributed to my safety. This acknowledgement, however, is perhaps more particularly due to the female part of the nation,.....(for) I do not recollect a single instance of hard-heartedness towards me in the women. In all my wanderings and wretchedness, I found them uniformly kind and compassionate; and I can truly say, as my predecessor Mr. Ledyard has eloquently said before me; 'To a woman, I never addressed 'myself in the language of decency and friendship, 'without receiving a decent and friendly answer. If 'I was hungry or thirsty, wet, or sick, they did not 'hesitate, like the men, to perform a generous action. 'In so free, and so kind a manner did they contribute 'to my relief; that if I was dry, I drank the sweet-'est draught, and if hungry, I ate the coarsest mor-'sel with a double relish." 3.

This very saying of Mr. Ledyard immediately precedes Crabbe's poem, "Woman", which faithfully represents all Ledyard's sentiments. This example portrays the African woman's reaction at finding a white man lost and forlorn, in her country:

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1. Park, Travels in the Interior of Africa, p. 82.
2. Ibid., pp. 261-2.
3. Ibid., pp. 262-3.

"'What, though so pale his haggard face,
So sunk and sad his looks,' - she cries -
And far unlike our nobler race,
With crispèd locks and rolling eyes:
Yet misery marks him of our kind;
We see him lost, alone afraid;
And pangs of body, griefs in mind,
Pronounce him man, and ask our aid.'" 1

The implied question is, should such humanity be repaid by the inhumanity of the slave trade?

We can imagine with what joy both works - Crabbe's and Park's - were welcomed by the Abolitionist propagandists. Thus Crabbe, without any overt move to embrace the Abolitionists' cause, helped them in the very way they would have expected of him, had he been interested in their cause.

In his life and works, Crabbe, though primarily concerned with the cause of the poor, touches upon various problems of the society of his day. He exposes the unhealthy state of its schools by depicting the sufferings of the smaller boys, a state of affairs due only to a lack of efficiency and care on the part of those in authority. He deplores the brutality of its taste shown by the pleasure it takes in amusements involving the ruthless killing of animals. He shows his belief

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1. Crabbe, Poems, Vol. I, "Woman", p. 261, l. 13 ff.

that the slave trade ought never to have existed, although here, as in the case of animals, his protests are not as vehement or sustained as Cowper's. But then, his was the cause of the poor, and in his representations of their extremity, no one can doubt the sincerity or miss the power of his appeal. It is an appeal based upon his vivid sense of the community of mankind, the humblest and the highest of whom are bound together by common sensations. Hence, he endeavours in his works to arouse in us an awareness of this homogeneity and continuity which connects us "without degradation".

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CHAPTER VII.

WILLIAM WORDSWORTH.

In The Prelude, Wordsworth, reviewing the accounts of society that he found in the literature of his day, and comparing them with his own experience, says:

"True it is, where oppression worse than death
Salutes the Being at his birth, where grace
Of culture hath been utterly unknown,
And labour in excess and poverty
From day to day pre-occupy the ground
Of the affections, and to Nature's self
Oppose a deeper nature, there indeed,
Love cannot be....." [1]

By "love" he means all the elements that go to the making of "the dignity of individual Man".[2] He warns us, however, against the danger of generalizing on the strength of such accounts.

".....Books mislead us, looking for their fame
To judgments of the wealthy Few, who see
By artificial lights, how they debase
The Many for the pleasure of those Few
Effeminately level down the truth
To certain general notions for the sake
Of being understood at once, or else
Through want of better knowledge in the men
Who frame them, flattering thus our self-conceit

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1. Wordsworth, The Prelude, Book XII, l. 194 ff.
2. Ibid., l. 83.

With pictures that ambitiously set forth
The differences, the outward marks by which
Society has parted man from man,
Neglectful of the universal heart." 1

He feels therefore that we often miss the truth in our anxiety to achieve some betterment. Yet it is not that he was unaware of the miseries of his time. The Female Beggar of "An Evening Walk"; "The Female Vagrant", later incorporated in "Guilt and Sorrow"; his "Poems Dedicated to National Independence and Liberty"; his "Sonnets Dedicated to Liberty and Order" and those "Upon the Punishment of Death"; his poems "Humanity" and "The Convict"; Margaret of "The Ruined Cottage" in Book I of "The Excursion", and, in Book VIII, the picture of a child employed in a cotton-mill, and of the ignorance and degradation of children among the agricultural population: all these poems and delineations, also his prose writings and his correspondence, point to a sound knowledge of the needs of his time. Yet he is able to say emphatically that

".....Neither guilt nor vice,
Debasement of the body or the mind,
Nor all the misery forced upon my sight,
Which was not lightly passed, but often scann'd
Most feelingly, could overthrow my trust
In what we may become....." 2

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1. Wordsworth, The Prelude, Book XII, l. 207 ff.
2. Ibid., Book VIII, l. 801 ff.

These are the words of a man who had scaled the heights of human hopes, only to be crushed down into the depths of near-despair. Without losing sight of the inevitability of suffering, Wordsworth yet believes that happiness must be found in this life if it is to be found at all.

In all the people we have considered so far, we have found a fervent belief in the natural rights of humanity, together with a stern awareness of their infringements and a readiness to make vehement protest. With Wordsworth, we notice for the first time a change in the focus of attention. By John Howard, Mrs Fry, by Wilberforce and Clarkson, man is portrayed in so miserable a state that it takes sheer will-power to read on and observe the extent of his degradation. In spite of some light touches, even Edgeworth did not succeed in relieving the gloom, while Day, Cowper, and especially Crabbe, added to it by the details their sympathetic observation brought to light. It is not difficult to be carried away by the words of men who wrote straight from the heart; and under the spell of their spiritual and emotional intensity, it is even easier to forget that their vision may have been narrow in its range. Hence, Wordsworth's warning [1] may have been

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1. Supra, p. 149.

directed towards our own group of humanitarian authors and 'agitators'. In his view, the means they used for their praiseworthy end, the lessening of human suffering, would actually defeat their purpose. Efforts to strengthen the bonds between men in different levels of society would do the exact opposite by throwing greater emphasis on ".....The differences, the outward marks by which Society has parted man from man, Neglectful of the universal heart."

To counteract this unforeseen, and even unsuspected, adverse influence, our poet tells us that his theme shall be:

> "No other than the very heart of man
> As found among the best of those who live
> Not unexalted by religious hope,
> Not uninformed by books, good books though few,
> In Nature's presence: thence may I select
> Sorrow that is not sorrow, but delight,
> And miserable love that is not pain
> To hear of, for the glory that redounds
> Therefrom to human kind and what we are.....
> Matter not lightly to be heard by those
> Who to the letter of the outward promise
> Do read the invisible soul....." 1

At once the picture of Michael comes to mind. Here the dignity of men poor and humble in worldly circumstances - something too often forgotten or overlooked by our humanitarians - is set forth in a style

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1. Wordsworth, The Prelude, Book XII, l. 240 ff.

fully appropriate to the character portrayed. Near the beginning of the poem we are introduced to Michael:

"An old man, stout of heart, and strong of limb.
His bodily frame had been from youth to age
Of an unusual strength: his mind was keen,
Intense, and frugal, apt for all affairs,
And in his shepherd's calling he was prompt
And watchful more than ordinary men.
Hence had he learned the meaning of all winds,
Of blasts of every tone; and oftentimes,
When others heeded not, he heard the South
Make subterraneous music.....
.....and he to himself would say,
'The winds are now devising work for me!'
And, truly, at all times, the storm, that drives
The traveller to a shelter, summoned him
Up to the mountains: he had been alone
Amid the heart of many thousand mists,
That came to him, and left him, on the heights.
So lived he till his eightieth year was past.
And grossly that man errs, who should suppose
That the green valleys, and the streams and rocks
Were things indifferent to the Shepherd's thoughts.
Fields, where with cheerful spirits he had breathed
The common air; hills, which with vigorous step
He had so often climbed; which had impressed
So many incidents upon his mind
Of hardship, skill or courage; joy or fear;
Which, like a book, preserved the memory
Of the dumb animals, whom he had saved,
Had fed or sheltered, linking to such acts
The certainty of honourable gain;
Those fields, those hills - what could they less? had laid
Strong hold on his affections, were to him
A pleasureable feeling of blind love,
The pleasure which there is in life itself." 1

This is the kind of life Wordsworth believes in and recommends for the poor and humble. It is a

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1. Wordsworth, Works, "Michael", p. 104, l. 42 ff.

life of "hardship, skill or courage.....or fear", but also one that will infuse the man leading it with "cheerful spirits.....joy.....the certainty of honourable gain....." and "strong hold on his affections.....". In short, he shall find "the pleasure which there is in life itself". Wordsworth recommends a life in the open air for all, where man's spirit may have space to wander and where he can feel the full force of that beauty and benignity of Nature that purges the mind of

> ".....the weight of meanness, selfish cares,
> Coarse manners, vulgar passions, that beat in
> On all sides from the ordinary world
> In which we traffic....." [1]

Man is to find in Nature his sure safeguard and defence against all these.

The Wanderer of "The Excursion" is "Michael" on a more elaborate scale. Both poems point to the peace and consoling strength that can be derived from a life lived close to Nature. Going lower in the social and economic scale, we have the old Leech-Gatherer who inspires the poet and ourselves by his "resolution and independence". Lower still, we have "The Old Cumberland Beggar" whose apparently useless existence

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1. Wordsworth, The Prelude, Book VIII, l. 453 ff.

actually serves to keep alive the compassion of man, and we feel that on this account he is dear to our poet. By so doing he gives force to Wordsworth's belief that

> ".....'Tis Nature's law
> That none, the meanest of created things,
> Of forms created the most vile and brute,
> The dullest or most noxious, should exist
> Divorced from good - a spirit and pulse of good,
> A life and soul, to every mode of being
> Inseparably linked....." 1

And thus, the old beggar, by going his round of collection, and the Leech-gatherer, by his timely admonition to a despairing young poet, turn our mind to the omnipresent benevolence of "Nature's holy plan", and reinforce the idea that

> ".....Man is dear to Man, the poorest poor
> Long for some moments in a dreary life
> When they can know and feel that they have been,
> Themselves, the fathers and dealers-out
> Of some small blessings; have been kind to such
> As needed kindness, for this single cause
> That we have all of us one human heart." 2

We all have goodness in us: "A simple blessing, or with evil mixed", because no creature is perfect, and we must communicate it to others, for as Nature tells us, it is a

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1. Wordsworth, Works, "The Old Cumberland Beggar", p. 444, l. 73 ff.
2. Ibid., p. 444, l. 147.

"Spirit that knows no insulated spot,
No chasm, no solitude; from link to link
It circulates, the Soul of all the worlds.
This is the freedom of the universe." 1

Does not this spirit shine through the words and actions of all the people we have been studying? And is not the lack, or bondage of this spirit, what our humanitarian workers and poets were trying to trace when they hinted at the underlying cause of all the wretchedness in the world - a 'something lacking' which manifests in various guises, as cruelty, oppression, ignorance and privation? Howard was of Wordsworth's conviction that there is goodness in all of us.

".....as no man passes through life without some deviation from strict rectitude, so none has lived without the performance of some good actions." 2

Hence he believed that the solution of "the miseries of my fellow-creatures" lay in the arousing of the better side of their nature - Wordsworth's "spirit and pulse of good". And so he dedicated his life and service to the task of

".....exciting mankind, by mutual exertions for mutual relief, to connect more strongly the social

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1. Wordsworth, Works, "The Excursion", Book IX, p. 689, l. 13 ff.
2. Farrar, John Howard, p. 87.

bond by which they should ever be held together". 1

Elizabeth Fry also touched this string in her frequent exhortations to society not to

> ".....rest content with subscribing of their abundance, or even of their penury, to refuges, to hospitals, and schools, but that they would give of that which is more precious - of time, sympathy, communion between man and man, and mind with mind". 2

If such a communion were not possible, if no "spirit and pulse of good" existed in the human soul, could Wilberforce and Clarkson have succeeded in their glorious battle against slavery? What do we mean when we say of the Abolitionists that they never slackened in their task of mobilizing public opinion against an antagonistic Parliament? What else but that they persistently assailed a hardened national conscience, believing that if they could break through its exterior walls of narrow economic outlook, and even of greed, they could release the power of man's inherent goodness. If this be sophistry, how is it that Wilberforce is still known as "The Keeper of the Nation's Conscience"?

The very success of the Abolitionists and,

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1. Taylor, Howard's Memoirs, p. 389.
2. Cresswell and Fry, Memoir of Elizabeth Fry, Vol. II, p. 92.

after them, the Emancipators, in achieving their goal by appealing directly to the conscience of the individual man seems to justify Wordsworth's fervent belief in the existence of "the spirit and pulse of good". But while he believed that the appeal to this spirit was all the action necessary in the removal of abuses, the other humanitarians considered it only a first step, a preparing of the way for further action. From what we know of their struggles, in and out of Parliament, it is easy to see that they could not share Wordsworth's faith in the activating power of that spirit. Yet we can equally understand how Wordsworth, holding such a creed, must protest against the cry for Parliamentary intervention in what he conceived as "a matter of private conscience".

> "Fanaticism is the disease of these times as much or more than any other; fanaticism is set, as it has always been, whether moral, religious, or political, upon attainment of its end with disregard of the means. In this question there are <u>three</u> parties - the slave, the slave-owner, and the British people. As to the first, it might be submitted to the consideration of the owner whether in the present state of society, he can, as a matter of private conscience, retain his property in the slave, after he is convinced that it would be for the slave's benefit, civil, moral, and religious, that he should be emancipated. Whatever pecuniary loss might, under

> these circumstances, attend emancipation, it seems that a slave-owner, taking a right view of the case, ought to be prepared to undergo it. It is probable however, that one of the best assurances which could be given of the slave being likely to make a good use of his liberty will be found in his ability and disposition to make a recompense for the sacrifice should the master, from the state of his affairs, feel himself justified in accepting a recompense. But by no means does it follow, from this view of individual cases, that the third party, the people of England, who through their legislature have sanctioned and even encouraged slavery, have a right to interfere for its destruction by a sweeping measure, of which an equivalent to the owner makes no part. This course appears to me unfeeling and unjust....." 1

On all three counts, therefore, the best interest of each party could be served only if the whole issue were to remain "a matter of private conscience". Again:

> "Some time ago many persons were anxious to have a bill brought into Parliament to protect inferior animals from the cruelty of their masters. It has always appeared to me that such a law would not have the effect intended, but would increase the evil. The best surety for an uneducated man behaving with care and kindness to his beast lies in the sense of the uncontrolled property which he possesses in him. Hence a livelier interest, and a more efficient responsibility to his own conscience, than could exist were he made accountable for his conduct to law." 2

Thus, Wordsworth reaffirms his faith in the solution of yet another evil problem of his time by leaving man "to

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1. The Letters of William and Dorothy Wordsworth, arranged and edited by E. de Selincourt, Vol. II, p. 647.
2. Ibid., 648.

his own conscience". And we see that he differs from Cowper in opposing Parliamentary action in this field.[1]

In considering Wordsworth's "spirit and pulse of good" as it appears in the other characters studied, we seem to find, with Edgeworth and Day, a wide gulf separating the highly organized movements of the Prison Reformers and Abolitionists and the wholly individual and even eccentric manner in which either a conscious faith in humanity, or an unthinking benevolence, may be manifested. Edgeworth was much too practical a man, both in the field of education and on his own estate, to examine the root of his desire to improve the material and intellectual welfare of his fellow-men. But if he neither deliberately sought, nor was guided by, this spirit of goodness in others, his own life and actions are still clear reflections of its existence in himself. It appeared likewise in his friend, Day, whose benevolence not only occupied all his time, talents and fortune, but even led to his death.

Cowper was, by virtue of his religious belief and his high-strung sensibility, too painfully conscious of the presence of sin and evil in human nature to pay much attention to its better side. If the latter

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1. Cf. Cowper, Works, "The Task", Book VI, ll. 386-433.

existed it was all too rare, and even then it was overshadowed by the darker. This knowledge or belief of his, however, was not strong enough to kill the impulse in his heart to love and be at one with his fellows, and he said to "one sage, erudite, profound":

> "What edge of subtlety canst thou suppose
> Keen enough, wise and skilful as thou art,
> To cut the link of brotherhood, by which
> One common Maker bound me to the kind?" 1

What better proof than this can one have that the "spirit and pulse of good" was indeed in him? Unless it is this: that he continued to love his fellowmen even after he had arrived at the unshakeable conviction that their "common Maker" had foredoomed him to eternal perdition although he was never guilty of their excesses.

Crabbe also was conscious of his fellows'

> ".....want of virtuous will,
> Of honest shame, of time-improving skill,.....
> And want of every kind but want of power." 2

Yet this only added to his sympathy with their sufferings which sometimes appeared as bitterness at the order of society and which prompted his endeavour, through his poems, to unite "all mankind by (making known) sensations

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1. Cowper, Poetical Works, "The Task", Book III, p.168, l.206 ff.
2. Crabbe, Poems, "The Parish Register", Book I, p.164, l.226 ff.

common to us all.....even to the most miserable and guilty of our fellowmen". [1] And what would be the result of this but to arouse in us that which Wordsworth calls the "spirit and pulse of good"?

We realise that all the people we have considered shared in some degree in Wordsworth's belief that

> ".....'Tis Nature's law
> That none, the meanest of created things
> .....should exist
> Divorced from good....."

They manifested this faith in different ways in both word and action, although it was Wordsworth who gave it such fine and precise expression.

Yet his own belief far transcended this. For he avers:

> "Not only that the inner frame is good,
> And graciously composed, but that no less
> Nature through all conditions hath a power
> To consecrate, if we have eyes to see,
> The outside of her creatures, and to breathe
> Grandeur upon the very humblest face
> Of human life. I felt that the array
> Of outward circumstance and visible form
> Is to the pleasure of the human mind
> What passion makes it, that meanwhile the forms
> Of Nature have a passion in themselves
> That intermingles with those works of man

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1. Crabbe, Poems, Preface of "The Borough", p. 280.

To which she summons him, although the works
Be mean, have nothing lofty of their own....." 1

Hence, in his description of "The Sailor's Mother", he shows us, not the squalor or, at best, the pitiable attempt at decency, one would expect to find in a beggar, but tells us that she was

"Majestic in her person, tall and straight;
And like a Roman matron's was her mien and gait.....
Proud was I that my country bred
Such strength, a dignity so fair....." 2

I can almost hear the gasp of disbelief from those who are unacquainted with Wordsworth's deeper thoughts.

In another encounter with a beggar-woman and her two boys, he calls our attention to the "graceful flow" of her mantle; the cap upon her head "as white as newfallen snow"; her skin of "Egyptian brown"; and her haughty bearing, "fit person for a Queen". We can see that here, as in the former case, his consciousness of an inherent dignity, plus a certain transfigurative power in his sense of vision, called these eulogies from him, so that he was able to say of her :

".....the creature
Was beautiful to see - a weed of glorious feature." 3

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1. Wordsworth, The Prelude, Book XII, l. 280 ff.
2. Ibid., Works, p. 94, l. 5 ff.
3. Ibid., "Beggars", p. 151, l. 17 ff.

Moreover, in turning his attention to her sons, he describes them as being "so blithe of heart", "merry", "joyous", "so happy and so fair". The question arises, did all these qualities really exist in the subjects, or were they mere figments of our poet's mind? After all, he did say that

> ".....the array
> Of outward circumstance and visible form
> Is to the pleasure of the human mind
> What passion makes it....."

But, for him, passion means "highest reason in a soul sublime".[1] Further, as we have just seen, he attributes also to the forms of nature a "passion" or "highest reason", existing objectively and independently of human "passion".

> ".....Meanwhile the forms
> Of Nature have a passion in themselves
> That intermingles with those works of men
> To which she summons him, although the works
> Be mean, have nothing lofty of their own....."

One thing is clear at this stage: whether the qualities described actually existed in their subject or not, the perception is still a product of the interaction and fusion of two distinct but apparently

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1. Wordsworth, The Prelude, Book V, l. 40.

complementary forces - Nature and the mind of man. What was Wordsworth's concept of the relationship between the two? The question is important, for if the result of their interaction be not sheer illusion, then goodness, beauty, joy and love must really exist in the objects perceived, in which case these - in our example the beggars - are less deplorable than over-zealous authors would have us believe, and life in this world is not such an intolerable burden after all. And for one who believes that

> ".....the very world which is the world
> Of all of us is the place in which, in the end
> We find our happiness or not at all....." 1

the answer to such a question is vitally related to the purpose of his existence. Our poet believed in the existence of goodness in all because it is Nature's law that none should exist without it, just as no-one with eyes to see it need exist without beauty. With this theme in mind, he writes a Sonnet:

> "'Weak is the will of Man, his judgment blind;
> Remembrance persecutes, and Hope betrays;
> Heavy is woe; - and joy, for human kind,
> A mournful thing, so transient is the blaze!'
> Thus might he paint our lot of mortal days
> Who wants the glorious faculty assigned

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1. Wordsworth, The Prelude, Book X, l. 726 ff.

To elevate the more-than-reasoning Mind,
And colour life's dark cloud with orient rays.
Imagination is that sacred power,
Imagination lofty and refined:
'Tis hers to pluck the amaranthine flower
Of Faith, and round the sufferer's temples bind
Wreaths that endure affliction's heaviest shower
And do not shrink from sorrow's keenest wind."

That Wordsworth believed as he did; saw, felt and communicated joy as he did and still does, are testimony enough that he possessed this transfigurating power to the full. Thus he was able to see beauty and majesty, and derive hope and even joy where none would even think of looking for them. It was this faculty that led Basil Willey to say, in commenting upon the special qualities of certain passages in The Prelude which communicate imaginative experiences: [1]

"Why were these recollections invigorating? By the time he was ready to answer this question Wordsworth had acquired partly through conversation and collaboration with Coleridge and partly from reflexion on his own experience, a set of theories about the imagination, the relationship of the mind with Nature, and the psychology of poetic creation. .....In the ceaseless interplay of Mind and Nature sometimes the one and sometimes the other is predominant. He speaks of two main states of his soul, one the uncreative, in which he is under the 'despotism of the eye', and the mind is 'prostrate, overborne', a mere passive 'pensioner on outward forms', the other the creative, in which 'the mind is lord and

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1. Book I, ll. 329-332; 245-350; 417-427; 466-473; Book V, ll. 406-413; Book XI, ll. 258-343.

master', and through its own 'plastic power' can transfigure, without distorting, all it contemplates, adding the 'visionary' quality to natural objects, darkening the 'midnight storm' or adding 'new splendour' to the setting sun." 1

In the poet's own words:

".....I remember well
That in life's every-day appearances
I seem'd about this period to have sight
Of a new world, a world, too, that was fit
To be transmitted and made visible
To other eyes, as having for its base
That whence our dignity originates,
That which both gives it being and maintains
A balance, an ennobling interchange
Of action from within and from without,
The excellence, pure spirit, and best power
Both of the object seen, and eye that sees." 2

"That whence our dignity originates," - is not this the key to his decision

".....to choose incidents and situations from common life,.....to throw over them a certain colouring of imagination, whereby ordinary things should be presented to the mind in an unusual aspect....." ? 3

And why "unusual"? Is it not because man has forgotten that

".....Oft high service is perform'd within,
When all the external man is rude in shew "? 4

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1. Willey, The Eighteenth Century Background, pp. 278-9.
2. Wordsworth, The Prelude, Book XII, l. 368 ff.
3. Ibid., Preface to second edition of "Lyrical Ballads".
4. Ibid., The Prelude, Book XII, l. 226 ff.

We may wonder at this persistent call to penetrate the inner man by the eye of imagination. But imagination is for Wordsworth "the faculty which is perhaps the noblest of our nature" since it alone can infuse us with faith so that we can

".....endure affliction's heaviest shower
And.....not shrink from sorrow's keenest wind".

It is as if he knows that unless we can see the beauty of the interior man, we shall never be able to see the "grandeur" that Nature breathes upon "the very humblest face of human life". Wordsworth was not a stranger to the dark side of life with its problems of want, hunger, bondage, degradation, disease and death. He knew how easy it is to let one's mind be exclusively absorbed by such ideas; consequently he is anxious to remind us that this - formidable as it is - is not the whole picture and that there is yet room for hope and joy. We must believe it, so that "not without hope we suffer and we mourn".[1] In the Preface to the 1835 edition of his Works, after a long commentary on the Poor Law Amendment Act, in which he upholds the humane principle underlying the Poor Law, but criticizes

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1. Wordsworth, Works, "Elegiac Stanza", p. 453, l. 60.

its application, Wordsworth says:

> "Without hope men become reckless, and have a sullen pride in adding to the heap of their own wretchedness. He who feels that he is abandoned by his fellow-men will be almost irresistibly driven to care little for himself; will lose his self-respect accordingly, and with that loss what remains to him of virtue."

Hope is, therefore, essential to the life of any self-respecting and virtuous man, and hope is founded upon faith. From preceding chapters we have seen that every possible means was made use of in attempts to alleviate man's sufferings in material ways. Yet there was always a sense of something wanting, something fundamental, appertaining to his moral integrity. Our poet has defined this want for us, at the same time holding out to us a message of hope and even joy. But has this message power enough to make itself heard by people overwhelmed with a sense of defeat, injustice and cruel neglect? Let us recall the conditions in which Wordsworth declares love "cannot dwell". Where these were found, excessive poverty and labour, oppression, the complete lack of "the grace of culture", nothing less than the presence, with activity and concrete results, of such people as Howard, Mrs. Fry, Wilberforce and Clarkson, could make itself felt. The prototypes of Crabbe's most wretched characters were

among such sufferers, and they abound, likewise, in the records and journals of the reformers just mentioned. Yet while their numbers may be shockingly large, they represent none the less the extreme cases.

We must consider also the people for whom we have adopted as types Michael and the Leech-gatherer. And, going higher in the social, economic and intellectual scale, we may ask of such men as Cowper, and Wordsworth himself; have they no need of strength and consolation? Were not their lives the richer because they believed that:

> ".....Nature never did betray
> The heart that loved her; 'tis her privilege,
> Through all the years of this our life, to lead
> From joy to joy: for she can so inform
> The mind that is within us, so impress
> With quietness and beauty, and so feed
> With lofty thoughts, that neither evil tongues,
> Rash judgments, nor the sneers of selfish men,
> Nor greetings where no kindness is, nor all
> The dreary intercourse of life,
> Shall e'er prevail against us, or disturb
> Our cheerful faith, that all which we behold
> Is full of blessing." [1]

When Michael received the news that his son, Luke, had given himself up to a dissolute life in the city where he had been sent to repair a family debt, after leading a life of purity and industry by the side

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1. Wordsworth, Works, "Lines Composed a Few Miles above Tintern Abbey", p. 165, l. 122 ff.

of his father, what did he do?

".....Among the rocks
He went, and still looked up to sun and cloud,
And listened to the wind; and, as before,
Performed all kinds of labour for his sheep,
And for the land, his small inheritance.
And to that hollow dell from time to time
Did he repair, to build the Fold of which
His flock had need. 'Tis not forgotten yet
The pity which was then in every heart
For the old Man - and 'tis believed by all
That many and many a day he thither went
And never lifted up a single stone." 1

In his sorest affliction, he knew where solace was to be found, as did the poet who told us:

"I was a stricken deer that left the herd
Long since; with many an arrow deep infixt
My panting side was charg'd, when I withdrew
To seek a tranquil death in distant shade." 2

This calls to mind Wordsworth's poem, "Hart-Leap Well", based upon the story of a cruel chase. There is nothing new about the choice of such a subject; we find it as early as James Thomson's "Seasons", where, under the section entitled "Autumn", we have shooting and hunting condemned as

"This falsely cheerful barbarous game of death," 3

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1. Wordsworth, Works, "Michael", p. 110, l.455 ff.
2. Cowper, Poetical Works, "The Task", Book III, p. 166, ll. 108-111.
3. Line 384.

and "the latent prey" described with as much tenderness and sympathy as we find in Cowper. But here in Wordsworth, although the theme is the very same, the whole effect is different. We see the hart toiling along the mountain side; "For thirteen hours he ran a desperate race" until he reached his home beside a spring.[1] We are given a last look at the poor animal:

> "Upon his side the Hart was lying stretched:
> His nostril touched a spring beneath a hill,
> And with the last deep groan his breath had fetched
> The waters of the spring were trembling still." 2

Not only the spring, but the whole face of Nature there shows the extent to which she shares in his cruel death for,

> "More doleful place did never eye survey:
> It seemed as if the spring-time came not here,
> And Nature here were willing to decay." 3

Because

> "This Beast not unobserved by Nature fell;
> His death was mourned by sympathy divine.
> The Being that is in the clouds and air,
> That is in the green leaves among the groves,
> Maintains a deep and reverential care
> For the unoffending creatures whom he loves." 4

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1. Wordsworth, Works, "Hart-Leap Well," p. 161, l.145.
2. Ibid., p. 160, l. 41 ff.
3. Ibid., p. 161, l. 114 ff.
4. Ibid., p. 161, l. 163 ff.

Here is not a threat of divine vengeance that will visit the offender in the near or distant future, such as we find in Cowper, but the presence of immediate "sympathy divine". Not the seeking of an uncertain refuge at human hands, but the surety of a loving one in the arms of Nature where we all belong, the brute together with the human. In spite of differences in their concept of the Being responsible for us all, there can be no question as to the consolation and strength both poets derived from their belief that He is there to right all wrongs, and that nothing happens without His knowledge and even sanction.

There are many to whom age brings trials and infirmities as it does to the Leech-gatherer. Without a fervent belief in the benevolence underlying the scheme of existence upon this earth, could he "in his extreme old age", with a body

> ".....bent double, feet and head
> Coming together in life's pilgrimage;
> As if some dire constraint of pain, or rage
> Of sickness felt by him in times long past,
> A more than human weight upon his frame had cast," 1

have had the "resolution and independence" to spend the last days of his life pacing

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1. Wordsworth, Works, "Resolution and Independence", p. 156, l. 66 ff.

"About the moors continually,
Wandering about alone and silently" ? 1

We are told that

".....gathering leeches, far and wide
He travelled; stirring thus about his feet
The waters of the pools where they abide." 2

Withal he had a cheerfulness and kindliness of demeanour "stately in the main", which would have laughed to scorn our pity or commiseration with his lot. He had faith in his existence; unlike the poet beside him, who, in spite of youth, health and talent, could dwell on nothing but

".....the fear that kills;
And hope that is unwilling to be fed;
Cold, pain, and labour, and all fleshly ills;
And mighty Poets in their misery dead," 3

so that "perplexed and longing to be comforted," the young man had to turn to the old for strength and encouragement.

Wordsworth himself, as we know, did not live only in peaceful contemplation of his exalted visions, but walked and suffered with his fellows, and like them could be the prey of despair. Without his faith in

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1. Wordsworth, Works, "Resolution and Independence" p. 157, l. 130 ff.
2. Ibid., p. 157, l. 121 ff.
3. Ibid., p. 156, l. 113 ff.

Nature, could he have struggled back to a life of hope, joy and achievement, after his love for his country had been turned to an unnatural hatred on her Declaration of War against France; when his faith in humanity had been undermined by the Reign of Terror; and when his trust in the pure light of reason to deliver him from the turmoil in his soul had been repulsed by the coldness of Godwinism? In the fury of the moment when all his heart and soul were immersed in earthly schemes, Nature seemed far away. But Dorothy, his sister, guided him back, and Coleridge, his friend, paved the way for a complete reconciliation by clearing away the philosophical entanglement of his mind. Yet, in the end, it was his inherent faith in Nature which brought him to his true self once more, and in a long invocation he thus addresses her:

"Witness, ye Solitudes! where I received
My earliest visitations, careless then
Of what was given me, and where now I roam,
A meditative, oft a suffering Man,
And yet I trust, with undiminish'd powers,
Witness, whatever falls my better mind,
Revolving with the accidents of life,
May have sustain'd, that, howsoe'er misled,
I never, in the quest of right and wrong,
Did tamper with myself from private aims;
Nor was in any of my hopes the dupe
Of selfish passions; nor did wilfully
Yield ever to mean cares and low pursuits;
But rather did with jealousy shrink back
From every combination that might aid

The tendency, too potent in itself,
Of habit to enslave the mind, I mean
Oppress it by the laws of vulgar sense,
And substitute a universe of death,
The falsest of all worlds, in place of that
Which is divine and true. To fear and love,
To love as first and chief, for there fear ends,
Be this ascribed: to early intercourse,
In presence of sublime and lovely forms,
With the adverse principles of pain and joy.....
.....By love, for here
Do we begin and end, all grandeur comes,
All truth and beauty, from pervading love,
That gone, we are as dust....." 1

We see now the source of his strength. It is "love" engendered in the presence of "sublime and lovely forms" of Nature. Hence his vehement protests against anything that tends to weaken or break the bonds of affection, especially among the poor and down-trodden, for whom so often it is the only possible source of strength. In Book VIII of "The Excursion", Wordsworth sees it disappearing as an evil consequence of the spreading of the spirit of industrial progress. We hear its importance emphasized in "Guilt and Sorrow" where the old Sailor says:

"Bad is the world, and hard is the world's law
Even for the man who wears the warmest fleece;
Much need have ye that time more closely draw
The bond of nature, all unkindness cease,
And that among so few there still be peace:

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1. Wordsworth, The Prelude, Book XIII, l. 123 ff.

Else can ye hope but with such numerous foes
Your pain shall ever with your years increase?" 1

In "Michael", again referring to his irreparable loss, our poet says:

"There is a comfort in the strength of love;
'Twill make a thing endurable, which else
Would overset the brain, or break the heart....." 2

Coming back to himself, he says in the "Ode on the Intimations of Immortality":

".....I raise
The song of thanks and praise.....
.....For those first affections,
Those shadowy recollections,
Which be they what they may,
Are yet the fountain-light of all our day,
Are yet a master-light of all our seeing;
Uphold us, cherish, and have power to make
Our noisy years seem moments in the being
Of the eternal Silence: truths that wake,
To perish never:
Which neither listlessness nor mad endeavour,
Nor Man nor Boy,
Nor all that is at enmity with joy,
Can utterly abolish or destroy!" 3

Hence, he makes acknowledgment:

"Thanks to the human heart by which we live,
Thanks to its tenderness, its joys and fears," 4

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1. Wordsworth, Works, "Guilt and Sorrow," p. 26, l.505 ff.
2. Ibid., "Michael", p. 109, l. 448 ff.
3. Ibid.,"Ode on the Intimations of Immortality", p. 461, l.143 ff.
4. Ibid., p. 462, l. 204 ff.

and because he knows to Whom he owes this many-splendoured gift, he says:

"To me the meanest flower that blows can give
Thoughts that do often lie too deep for tears." 1

Is it any wonder, then, that he should take as his perpetual theme "no other than the very heart of man"? His reasons for taking his subjects from "humble and rustic life", as stated in the Preface to the second edition of the "Lyrical Ballads", are important for us at this point:

> ".....because, in that condition, the essential passions of the heart find a better soil in which they can attain their maturity, are less under restraint, and speak a plainer and more emphatic language; because in that condition of life our elementary feelings coexist in a state of greater simplicity, and, consequently, may be more accurately contemplated, and more forcibly communicated; because the manners of rural life germinate from those elementary feelings, and, from the necessary character of rural occupations, are more easily comprehended, and are more durable; and, lastly, because in that condition the passions of men are incorporated with the beautiful and permanent forms of nature."

Our poet is talking about humble people, who, belonging to the lower ranks of society, are not for that reason depraved and vulgar, as some believe. In taking his stand, Wordsworth is opposing a tendency among certain people of his time to think that there are but two sorts

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1. Wordsworth, Works, "Ode on the Intimations of Immortality", p. 462, l. 206 ff.

or classes of people - those who are refined by virtue of their elevated social status, their academical training, and the leisurely life which their financial sufficiency enables them to enjoy; and the poor, ignorant, vice-ridden working-class who are incapable of any gentle or fine feeling.[1]

Wordsworth admits that for one reason or another, people may be reduced to such a state: and then, until their pressing material wants have been relieved, they are beyond intellectual or spiritual aid. But these are the few. And it is not only for the two extreme groups, but for the vast intermediate group of men, that he emphasizes the importance of "the bond of nature", "the strength of love", and offers his "song of thanks for those first affections". It is these that enable us to bear up under the worst afflictions: but if we desire to rise above them and feel joy in spite of them, there is need of something more even than human love. He says,

> ".....There is higher love
> Than this, a love that comes into the heart
> With awe and a diffusive sentiment;
> Thy love is human merely; this proceeds
> More from the brooding Soul, and is divine." [2]

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1. Wordsworth, The Prelude, Book XII, ll. 185-193.
2. Ibid., Book XIII, l.161 ff.

But how can we attain this? Through "Imagination", he tells us, for

"This love more intellectual cannot be
Without Imagination, which, in truth,
Is but another name for absolute strength
And clearest insight, amplitude of mind,
And reason in her most exalted mood....." 1

The change in the tone of language shows that here we are treading on different ground from a little while ago. There it was the common, earthly ground of human emotion, here we are reaching up into the spheres in search of a faith. Wordsworth nevertheless realizes that in the putting into action of this faculty of Imagination - whereby our soul is enabled to see and believe - he cannot help us.

".....Here must thou be, O Man'
Strength to Thyself; no Helper hast thou here;
Here keepest thou thy individual state:
No other can divide with thee this work,
No secondary hand can intervene
To fashion this ability; 'tis thine
In the recesses of thy nature, far
From any reach of outward fellowship,
Else is not thine at all. But joy to him,
Oh, joy to him who here hath sown, hath laid
Here the foundations of his future years!" 2

Faith is not easy to acquire. As the Wanderer says:

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1. Wordsworth, The Prelude, Book XIII, l. 166 ff.
2. Ibid., l. 188 ff.

"'Tis easy by comparison, an easy task
Earth to despise; but, to converse with heaven -
This is not easy; - to relinquish all
We have, or hope, of happiness and joy,
And stand in freedom loosened from this world,
I deem not arduous; but must needs confess
That 'tis a thing impossible to frame
Conceptions equal to the soul's desires;
And the most difficult of tasks to keep
Heights which the soul is competent to gain." 1

But, he says, the way remains open, for

".....The victory is most sure
For him, who, seeking faith by virtue, strives
To yield entire submission to the law
Of conscience - conscience reverenced and obeyed,
As God's most intimate presence in the soul,
And his most perfect image in the world." 2

These lines were written in Wordsworth's later years, and though they show a distinct bent towards orthodox religion, it is necessary to point out that, without ever regarding himself as an opponent to Christianity, he never considered himself at one with it. In the words of Ernest de Selincourt:

"Christianity had no special message for him. With Coleridge's attempt to fuse philosophy and religion he was wholly unconcerned. His philosophy, as far as he was a philosopher, was his religion; he never examined its logical implications, and any analysis that seemed to disturb its integrity he would have set down to 'that false secondary power by which we multiply distinctions', appealing against

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1. Wordsworth, Works, "The Excursion", Book IV, p.627, l. 130 ff.
2. Ibid., p. 628, l.222 ff.

> it to the tribunal of his own deepest experience. His faith was a passionate intuition of God present in the Universe and in the mind of man; his philosophy no more than the struggle of his reason to account for it. And to the end of his life this intuition remained the living centre of his creed ....." 1

The attainment of such a faith, therefore, is based upon the immediate apprehension of the mind and the senses in ineffable moments of vision. No wonder our poet declares that no one can tell us how to achieve it, much less achieve it for us. To expect him to say otherwise would be equivalent to going to the holder of any creed and demanding from him an account of how he came to his belief, asking him, in other words, to describe for us the whole mystery of the transformation of the soul when it steps over the bound of disbelief into the light of faith. Would such a description be possible? The nearest Wordsworth comes to an attempt is in Book VI of The Prelude, where he tries to envisage for us his own experience when the full power of his Imagination was upon him. He says:

> ".....In such visitings
> Of awful promise, when the light of sense
> Goes out in flashes that have shewn to us
> The invisible world, doth Greatness make abode,
> There harbours whether we be young or old.

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1. de Selincourt, Introduction to The Prelude, p. xxxiv.

Our destiny, our nature and our home
Is with infinitude, and only there;
With hope it is, hope that can never die,
Effort, and expectation, and desire,
And something evermore about to be.
The mind beneath such banners militant
Thinks not of spoils or trophies, nor of aught
That may attest its prowess, blest in thoughts
That are their own perfection, and reward,
Strong in itself, and in the access of joy
Which hides it like the overflowing Nile." 1

He can discuss and hint at the imaginative state by the use of metaphor and simile, but beyond that he cannot lead us. We have to find our own way. Is it asking too much to expect us to find it for ourselves? I do not think so. I believe that the preacher of a faith - of any faith - can only tell us about the basis of his belief, and all the reasons why he believes in it; after that it is for us to go away and think upon it. If we do so sincerely and with no other desire than to know the truth, the worst that can befall us is to find it is not what we seek. On the other hand we may find faith. In this way Wordsworth in his poem tells us about the basis of his belief: that by submitting his senses to Nature's dominion, man reaches his full moral and intellectual stature and recognizes, as Wordsworth himself does,

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1. Wordsworth, The Prelude, Book VI, l. 533 ff.

"In Nature and the language of the sense
The anchor of my purest thoughts, the nurse
The guide, the guardian of my heart, and soul
Of all my moral being." 1

Thus a man prepares himself for

".....That blessed mood,
In which the burthen of the mystery,
In which the heavy and the weary weight
Of all this unintelligible world
Is lightened: - that serene and blessed mood,
In which the affections gently lead us on, -
Until, the breath of this corporeal frame
And even the motion of our human blood
Almost suspended, we are laid asleep
In body, and become a living soul:
While with an eye made quiet by the power
Of harmony, and the deep power of joy,
We see into the life of things." 2

It is not easy to assess the value of such a faith, which sets all theological considerations at naught, and which, at the same time, may appear to some minds to suffer from the prejudice of optimism. But it is possible to observe its effect upon an individual who upheld it. This was William Hale White, or Mark Rutherford, as he is known in the literary world. White found the "Lyrical Ballads" at a time when he was struggling for his release from theological fetters, and says of the collection:

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1. Wordsworth, Works, "Lines Composed.....above Tintern Abbey", p. 165, l. 108 ff.
2. Ibid., l. 37.

> "It conveyed to me no new doctrine, and yet the change it wrought in me could only be compared with that which is said to have been wrought on Paul himself by the Divine apparition..... God is nowhere formally deposed, and Wordsworth would have been the last man to say that he had lost his faith in the God of his fathers. But his real God is not the God of the Church, but the God of the hills, the abstraction Nature, and to this my reverence was transferred. Instead of an object of worship which was altogether artificial, remote, never coming into genuine contact with me, I had now one which I thought to be real, one in which literally I could live and move and have my being, an actual fact before my eyes. God was brought from the heaven of the books, and dwelt on the downs in the far-away distances, and in every cloud-shadow which wandered across the valley. Wordsworth unconsciously did for me what every religious reformer has done - he re-created my Supreme Divinity; substituting a new and living spirit for the old deity, once alive, but gradually hardened into an idol." 1

White belongs to the Victorian era but he can well represent many of Wordsworth's own period who were sincerely seeking to believe, but who were repulsed by the formalities of orthodox religion. For all such, and for many an over-wrought intellectual of the nineteenth century, whose old values were upturned before he could approve the new, Wordsworth's Nature-religion must have come like a breath of spring in the dark morning of the industrial age.

To have been able to infuse, in an era which had need of the services of Howard, Mrs. Fry, Wilber-

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1. Willey, The Eighteenth Century Background, p. 291

force and Clarkson, with "that strength and knowledge full of peace", diverse types of people of whom the Leech-gatherer and Michael are fictional representatives and White a living one, constitutes no small service. Indeed, in that it answered a need of the soul common at all levels of humanity, it is the crown of the humanitarian achievements with which we have been concerned.

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CONCLUSION.

We have now come to the end of a piece of work in which the object has been "the deliberate and systematic study of humane principles" as they appear in the lives and works of a most varied group of people.

From the world of Prison Reform, we selected John Howard, who chose to tread its perilous and practically untrodden ways, rather than enjoy his days in the peace and affluence of an estate in Bedfordshire. He had "the cry of the miserable" in his ears, and readily dedicated his life to their relief. Not far behind him, we see the figure of Mrs. Elizabeth Fry. She was impelled by a deep sense of Christian love to emerge from the happy seclusion of a Quaker family and do her duty among the outcasts of her sex.

Turning our minds to the Abolitionists, William Wilberforce's fervent Evangelicalism speaks out clearly from a world ruled by political intrigues and economic considerations. His valiant struggle inside Parliament is equalled only by the selfless labour of his co-worker, Thomas Clarkson, outside it. Both men were fired by the voice of conscience to allow nothing to stand in the way of the success of their cause; neither threats to life, nor even the vilest personal calumny.

These were the leaders of organized activity. Among those we called 'individualists', Richard Lovell Edgeworth, without leaving either his home, which was at first a sprawling, dilapidated estate in Ireland, or his huge family of children, accomplished his full share in ameliorating the condition of the poor and advancing the course of education. The interests of his friend, Thomas Day, were more widely distributed. With a temperament inclined towards retirement and family circumstances wholly conducive to such a self-indulgence, Day was nevertheless directed by the sole motive of "beneficence to Mankind" in his concern with politics, legislation, education, slavery and the welfare of the poor.

Lastly we studied our poets, Cowper, Crabbe and Wordsworth - the pathetic, the embittered, and the exultant. From the seclusion of his cheerful parlour at Olney, Cowper could easily have avoided topics disastrous in their effect upon his sensitive temperament. His religious conviction, however, about the divinely ordained right of every living creature to an existence free from oppression and persecution, caused him to drive away every consideration of self, both in action and writing. Crabbe, likewise, could have chosen to forget about his humble beginnings at

Aldeburgh, but for his vivid memory and his sympathy.

Wordsworth's outlook differentiates him from all the other members of our group. Undoubtedly he was moulded by the influences of a happy boyhood among the dales, and by the stimulating and devoted friendships formed in manhood.

At the beginning of this thesis, I stated as my purpose, the study of the common sphere of influence of the two groups of people, the active reformers and the poets, and the comparative merit of their achievements in the material and spiritual or intellectual fields. That they were indeed subject to common influences is indicated by their all having thought, acted and written upon similar questions. No direct evidence appears, however, of their having stimulated one another to do so.

If we turn our mind to concrete achievements, particularly those of Howard, Mrs. Fry, Wilberforce and Clarkson, the result is imposing indeed. Not only does it indicate a wide range of sympathy and formidable pertinacity of effort, but it forms the beginning of what was to become the modern philanthropic and humanitarian movement. Turning to the spiritual side of the question, can we detect any trace of a release of intellectual forces, providing that steadying and

strengthening effect so vitally needed in those feverish times? To reach an answer, we must retrace our steps and study the different attitude with which each author attacked the task of recording his or her ideas or beliefs, and the nature and effect of the latter.

Howard and Mrs. Fry faced a world, the inhabitants of which were among the forsaken and forgotten of their time. Neither shirked any self-sacrifice in the sphere of action. But in giving written expression to their thoughts, both were guided by their immediate aims. Howard himself declared his object to be the collection of material which could subsequently be used to make known the extent of a national disgrace; the practical purpose was to put an end to it. Similarly, when Mrs. Fry took up her pen as an authoress, it was in order to aid novices in the work of prison reform.

Wilberforce and Clarkson both wrote on their combined struggle against human bondage. In this they were necessarily guided by propagandist motives. They - like Howard and Mrs. Fry - had "the cry of the miserable"in their ears, and it required their utmost energy to answer it. It is hardly to be expected, therefore, that people so constantly engaged in such fervid affray should have had much leisure to speculate upon

the spiritual implications of the evils they were combating, much less leave written records for posterity. It was enough for them that suffering existed and that they had it in their power to mitigate or remove it.

Edgeworth and Day both wrote a considerable amount, especially about education. In view of Mr. Edgeworth's practical bent of mind, it is not surprising to find no trace of his ever having indulged in philosophic exploration of our scheme of existence. Day, on the other hand, disappoints me by not having left any record of what must have occupied his mind as it passed from scene to scene of this chequered life of ours. But if he left us nothing fruitful in the intellectual sense, he made most selfless exertions in humanitarian fields, a fact testified to both by the actions of his life and the cause of his death.

We turn therefore to those for whom contemplation and writing form a natural activity, the poets. Cowper, in his lifetime, answered the appeal of the suffering by following the promptings of his tender nature to many little acts of kindness; in his writing, by urging men to be patient under their trials, since God's vengeance would surely fall on the heads of their oppressors. Of one whose unoffending existence was marred by an insurmountable conviction that he had been

arbitrarily chosen by God to be the special target of His Wrath, it is tragic to know that the only spiritual message that he had to offer his fellow-sufferers was to wait trustingly for its certain arrival upon their oppressors. For spiritual consolation, therefore, we shall have to look further afield, for what Cowper's message amounts to is that we should derive hope from the source of his despair.

Crabbe had sincerity and force in his sympathetic studies of the poor, but these form a series of pictures consistently gloomy, painful, and unmitigated by the least hint of joy or hope for better things to come. Bearing Crabbe's earlier life in mind, one can easily attribute his gloom to his own early experiences of frustration and pain. In finding his talent, however, he found also the opportunity to vent his deep bitterness, and in the practice of poetry, he assumed a habit of persistently rejecting the brighter side of life. The question now arises: is it ever possible to derive hope and strength from bitterness? It is true that the later Crabbe was mellowed by age, by the gratifying recognition of his literary merits, and the happy experiences which a comfortable level of living brings. Then, he would have his readers derive consolation from the bonds of common "sensations" which

bind them to their fellows, more especially to those who, as a consequence of "the stimulus to benevolence" provided by his poems, are in a position to help them. But do such bonds, in their mere existence, relieve present suffering? They may not only fail to assuage it, but may add pain or resentment to an affliction.

So far, the picture we have had painted for us is one of unutterable wretchedness. One wonders how anyone with the least sensitivity of mind could have borne to live in an atmosphere so void of hope and joy. But many did, and not only were they able to endure it, some actually succeeded in achieving peace and happiness in spite of it. Can it be, then, that something of importance has been left out of the picture?

This question brings us to Wordsworth. Wordsworth saw evil and pain in the world. Far from ignoring them, he records them as faithfully as did all the people we have considered. For the most part, however, in his work, he strove to call attention to the many other things that can be found as well - beauty, love, hope and peace. He, alone of our group, saw that unless we convince the suffering multitude that these can indeed be achieved in the life they so

resent, whatever material aid we may bring them must fall short of an actual or lasting relief. For always there remains - common to all, regardless of degree - the greater need of the soul.

This enquiry might be extended over the work of Blake, Coleridge and others, but as Wordsworth appears in a central place among such minds, a discussion would seem repetitious. All had in common the idea that restraint is evil in its effects and must be viewed with suspicion in whatever appearance it comes. Blake and Coleridge both believed that were mankind completely free from the restraints imposed by the Church and the state, instinctive goodness and natural intelligence would assert themselves triumphantly. But they offered no suggestions as to how the chasm between actual conditions and the paradise of complete freedom might be bridged. By the enterprise called Pantisocracy, Coleridge and Southey sought to relinquish civilization in so far as it meant rulers and prisons, social classes and personal property, traditional religion and education. But their ideals could not be realized.

Wordsworth shared their feeling regarding the evil of constraint, but he was more realistic than

Coleridge and still more so than Blake. Neither of these succeeded as he did in interpreting so many varied incidents of personal experience; nor did either point so clearly to a happier way of life. In spite of all this, their approach to humanitarian questions is more akin to Wordsworth's than to that of either Cowper or Crabbe. For this reason the latter were chosen as contrasts.

In brief assessment we may say that Howard, Mrs. Fry, Wilberforce, Clarkson, Edgeworth and Day have left us a legacy of active humanitarian achievements; Cowper, a religious appeal, and Crabbe, a "stimulus to benevolence". Wordsworth, in my view, transcends them all, for he brings us a message of "joy in widest commonalty spread".

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